SEPTEMBER, 1950

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# ARGOSY

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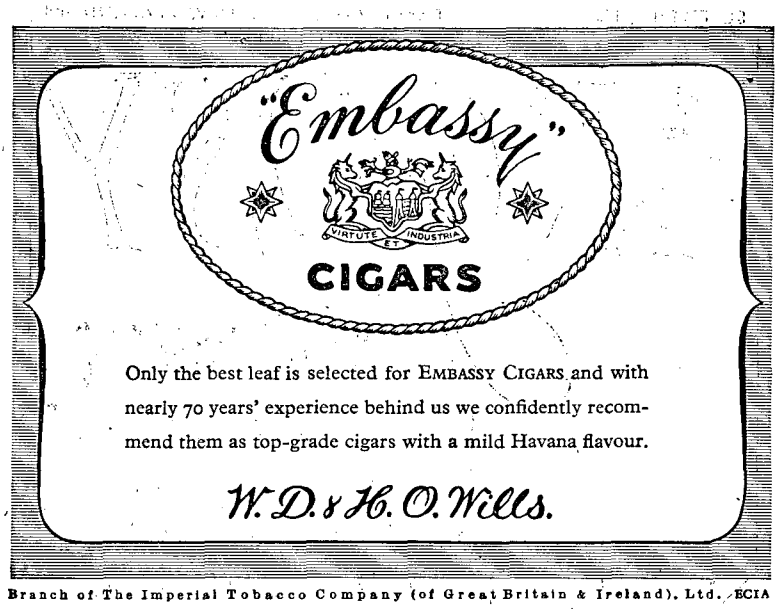


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*17th January*, 1950. *V. S., STROUD.*

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*1st May*, 1950. *J. A.*

. . . My article THE WRITING ON THE WALL was printed in the *Sunday Mail* during March. Many thanks for your great help.
*22nd April*, 1950. *J. A. M., PAISLEY.*

You can, if you wish, quote me as selling a story after only one lesson . . . In conclusion I would say it is to be regretted that I did not read of your School sooner . . . I have learned quite a lot even at this stage.
*28th March*, 1950. *J. C., LIVERPOOL.*

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# ARGOSY

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# September Tide

*SUCH a morning it is when love*
*leans through geranium windows*
*and calls with a cockerel's tongue.*

*When red-haired girls scamper like roses*
*over the rain-green grass;*
*and the sun drips honey.*

*When hedgerows grow venerable,*
*berries dry black as blood,*
*and holes suck in their bees.*

*Such a morning it is when mice*
*run whispering from the church,*
*dragging dropped ears of harvest.*

*When the partridge draws back his spring*
*and shoots like a buzzing arrow*
*over grained and mahogany fields.*

*Such a day it is when time*
*piles up the hills like pumpkins,*
*and the streams run golden.*

*When all men smell good,*
*and the cheeks of girls*
*are as baked bread to the mouth.*

*As bread and beanflowers*
*the touch of their lips,*
*and their white teeth sweeter than cucumbers.*

LAURIE LEE

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# DAY OF GRACE

**This was no time for sentiment but for practical propositions**

## by MORLEY CALLAGHAN

THAT summer when twelve year old Luke Baldwin came to live with his Uncle Henry in the house on the stream by the sawmill, he did not forget that he had promised his dying father he would try to learn things from his uncle ; so he used to watch him very carefully.

Uncle Henry, who was the owner of the sawmill, was a big, burly man weighing more than sixteen stone, and he had a rough skinned, brick coloured face. He looked like a powerful man, but his health was not good. He had aches and pains in his back and shoulders which puzzled the doctor.

The first thing Luke learned about Uncle Henry was that everybody had great respect for him. The four men he employed in the sawmill were always polite and attentive when he spoke to them. His wife, Luke's Aunt Helen, a kindly, plump, straightforward woman, never argued with him. " You should try and be like your Uncle Henry," she would say to Luke. " He's so wonderfully practical. He takes care of everything in a sensible, easy way."

Luke used to trail round the sawmill after Uncle Henry not only because he liked the fresh clean smell of the newly cut wood and the big piles of sawdust, but because he was impressed by his uncle's precise, firm tone when he spoke to the men.

Sometimes Uncle Henry would stop and explain to Luke something about a piece of timber. " Always try to learn the essential facts, son," he would say. " If you've got the facts, you know what's useful and what isn't useful, and no one can fool you."

He showed Luke that nothing of value was ever wasted around the mill. Luke used to listen, and wonder if there were another man in the world who knew so well what was needed and what ought to be thrown away.

Uncle Henry had known at once that Luke needed a bicycle to ride to his school, which was two miles away in town, and he bought him a good one. He knew that Luke needed good, serviceable clothes. He also knew exactly how much Aunt Helen needed to run the house, the price of everything, and how much a woman should be paid for doing the rough housework. In the evenings Luke used to sit

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in the sitting room watching his uncle making notations in a black notebook which he always carried in his vest pocket, and he knew that he was assessing all the transactions of the day.

Luke promised himself that when he grew up he, too, would be admired for his good, sound judgment. But, of course, he couldn't always be watching and learning from Uncle Henry, for too often when he watched him he thought of his own father; then he was lonely. So he began to build up another secret life for himself at the sawmill, and his companion was the eleven year old collie, Dan, a dog blind in one eye and with a slight limp in his left hind leg.

Dan was a fat, slow moving old dog. He was very affectionate and his eye was the colour of amber. His fur was amber too. When Luke left for school in the morning, the old dog followed him for half a mile down the road, and when he returned in the afternoon, there was Dan waiting at the gate.

Sometimes they would play round the millpond or by the dam, or go down the stream to the lake. Luke was never lonely when the dog was with him. There was an old rowing boat that they used as a pirate ship in the stream, and they would be pirates together, with Luke shouting instructions to Captain Dan and with the dog seeming to understand and wagging his tail enthusiastically. Its amber eye was alert, intelligent and approving. Then they would plunge into the copse on the other side of the stream, pretending they were hunting tigers. Of course, the old dog was no longer much good for hunting; he was too slow and too lazy. Uncle Henry no longer used him for hunting rabbits or anything else.

When they came out of the copse, they would lie together on the cool, grassy bank being affectionate with each other, with Luke talking earnestly, while the collie, as Luke believed, smiled with the good eye. Lying in the grass, Luke would say things to Dan he could not say to his uncle or his aunt. Not that what he said was important; it was just stuff about himself that he might have told to his own father or mother if they had been alive. Then they would go back to the house for lunch, and after lunch Dan would follow him down the road to Mr. Kemp's house, where they would ask old Mr. Kemp if they could go with him to round up his four cows. The old man was always glad to see them. He seemed to like watching Luke and the collie pretending they were cowboys.

Uncle Henry no longer paid much attention to the collie, though once when he tripped over him on the verandah, he shook his head and said thoughtfully, "Poor old fellow, he's through. Can't use him for anything. He just eats and sleeps and gets in the way."

One Sunday during Luke's summer holidays when they had returned from church and had had their lunch, they all moved out to the verandah where the collie was sleeping. Luke sat down

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on the step, his back against the verandah post, Uncle Henry took the rocking chair, and Aunt Helen stretched herself out in a deck-chair, sighing contentedly. Then Luke, eyeing the collie, tapped the step with the palm of his hand, giving three little taps like a signal and the old collie, lifting his head, got up stiffly with a slow wagging of the tail as an acknowledgment that the signal had been heard, and began to cross the verandah to Luke.

But the dog was sleepy; his bad eye was turned to the rocking chair; in passing, his left front paw went under the rocker. With a frantic yelp, the dog went bounding down the steps and hobbled round the corner of the house, where he stopped, hearing Luke coming after him. All he needed was the touch of Luke's hand. Then he began to lick the hand methodically, as if apologizing.

"Luke," Uncle Henry called sharply, "bring that dog here."

When Luke led the collie back to the verandah, Uncle Henry nodded and said, "Thanks, Luke." Then he took out a cigarette, lit it, put his big hands on his knees and began to rock in the chair while he frowned and eyed the dog steadily. Obviously he was making some kind of important decision about the collie.

"What's the matter, Uncle Henry?" Luke asked nervously.

"That dog can't see any more," Uncle Henry said.

"Oh, yes, he can," Luke said quickly. "His bad eye got turned to the chair, that's all, Uncle Henry."

"And his teeth are gone, too," Uncle Henry went on, paying no attention to what Luke had said. Turning to the deckchair he called, "Helen, sit up a minute, will you?"

When she got up and stood beside him, he went on, "I was thinking about this old dog the other day, Helen. It's not only that he's just about blind, but did you notice that when we drove up after church he didn't even bark?"

"It's a fact he didn't, Henry."

"No, not much good even as a watchdog now."

"Poor old fellow. It's a pity, isn't it?"

"And no good for hunting. He eats a lot, I suppose."

"About as much as he ever did, Henry."

"The plain fact is the old dog isn't worth his keep any more. It's time we got rid of him."

"It's always so hard to know how to get rid of a dog, Henry."

"I was thinking about it the other day. Some people think it's best to shoot a dog. I haven't had any cartridges for that shotgun for over a year. Poisoning is a hard death for a dog. Perhaps drowning is the easiest and quickest way. Well, I'll speak to one of the mill hands and get him to look after it."

Crouching on the ground, his arms round the old collie's neck,

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Luke cried out, " Uncle Henry, Dan's a wonderful dog ! You don't know how wonderful he is ! "

" He's just a very old dog, son," Uncle Henry said calmly. " The time comes when you have to get rid of any old dog. We've got to be practical about it. I'll get you a pup, son. A smart little dog that'll be worth its keep. A pup that will grow up with you."

" I don't want a pup ! " Luke cried, turning his face away. Circling round him, the dog began to bark, then flick his long pink tongue at the back of Luke's neck.

Aunt Helen, catching her husband's eye, put her finger on her lips, warning him not to go on talking in front of the boy.

But Luke was frightened, for he knew what his uncle was like. He knew that if his uncle had decided that the dog was useless and that it was sane and sensible to get rid of it, he would be ashamed of himself if he were diverted by any sentimental considerations. Luke knew in his heart that he couldn't move his uncle. All he could do, he thought, was to keep the dog away from his uncle, keep him out of the house, feed him when Uncle Henry wasn't about.

Next day at noon Luke saw his uncle walking from the mill towards the house with old Sam Carter, a mill hand. Sam Carter was a dull, stooped, slow-witted man of sixty with an iron-grey beard. He hardly ever spoke to anybody.

Watching from the verandah, Luke noticed that his uncle suddenly gave Sam Carter a cigarette, which Sam put in his pocket. Luke had never seen his uncle give Sam a cigarette or pay much attention to him.

Then, after lunch, Uncle Henry said lazily that he would like Luke to take his bicycle and go into town and get him some tobacco.

" I'll take Dan," Luke said.

" Better not, son," Uncle Henry said. " It'll take you all afternoon. I want that tobacco. Go along, Luke."

His uncle's tone was so casual that Luke tried to believe they were not merely getting rid of him. Of course he had to do what he was told. He had never dared to refuse to obey an order from his uncle. But when he had taken his bicycle and had ridden down the lane that followed the stream to the main road and had got about a quarter of a mile along the road, he found that all he could think of was his uncle handing old Sam Carter the cigarette.

Slowing down, sick with worry now, he got off the bike and stood uncertainly on the sunlit road. Sam Carter was a gruff, aloof old man who would have no feeling for a dog. Then suddenly Luke could go no farther without getting some assurance that the collie would not be harmed while he was away. Across the fields he could see the house.

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Leaving the bike in the ditch, he started to cross the fields, intending to get close enough to the house so Dan could hear him if he whistled softly. He got about fifty yards away from the house and whistled and waited, but there was no sign of the dog.

For a few minutes Luke couldn't make up his mind what to do, then he decided to go back to the road, get on his bike and go back the way he had come until he got to the place where the lane joined the road. There he could leave his bike, go up the lane, then into the tall grass and get close to the front of the house and the sawmill without being seen.

He had followed the drive for about a hundred yards, and when he came to the place where the river began to bend sharply towards the house his heart fluttered and his legs felt paralyzed, for he saw the old boat in the one place where the river was deep, and in the boat was Sam Carter with the collie.

The bearded man in the blue overalls was smoking the cigarette; the dog, with a rope round its neck, sat contentedly beside him, its tongue going out in a friendly lick at the hand holding the rope. It was all like a crazy dream picture to Luke; all wrong because it looked so lazy and friendly, even the curling smoke from Sam Carter's cigarette.

But as Luke cried out, "Dan, Dan! Come on boy!" and the dog jumped at the water, he saw that Sam Carter's left hand was hanging deep in the water, holding a foot of rope with a heavy stone at the end. As Luke cried out wildly, "Don't! Please don't!" Carter dropped the stone, for the cry came too late; it was blurred by the screech of the big saws at the mill. But Carter was startled, and he stared stupidly at the riverbank, then he ducked his head and began to row quickly to the bank.

But Luke was watching the collie take what looked like a long, shallow dive, except that the hind legs suddenly kicked up above the surface, then shot down, and while he watched, Luke sobbed and trembled, for it was as if the happy secret part of his life round the sawmill was being torn away from him. But even while he watched, he seemed to be following a plan without knowing it, for he was already fumbling in his pocket for his jack-knife, jerking the blade open, kicking his shoes off while he muttered fiercely and prayed that Sam Carter would get out of sight.

It hardly took the mill hand a minute to reach the bank and go slinking furtively round the bend as if he felt that the boy was following him. But Luke hadn't taken his eyes off the exact spot in the water where Dan had disappeared. As soon as the mill hand was out of sight, Luke slid down the bank and took a leap at the water, the sun glistening on his slender body, his eyes wild with eagerness as he ran out to the deep place, then arched his back and dived,

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swimming under water, his open eyes getting used to the greenish-grey haze of the water, the sandy bottom and the imbedded rocks.

His lungs began to ache, then he saw the shadow of the collie floating at the end of the taut rope, rock-held in the sand. He slashed at the rope with his knife. He couldn't get much strength in his arm because of the resistance of the water. He grabbed the rope with his left hand, hacking with his knife. The collie began to drift up slowly, like a water-soaked log. Then his own head shot above the surface, and while he was sucking in the air he was drawing in the rope, pulling the collie towards him and treading water. In a few strokes he was away from the deep place and his feet touched the bottom.

Hoisting the collie out of the water, he scrambled towards the bank, lurching and stumbling in fright because the collie felt like a dead weight.

He went on up the bank and across the path to the tall grass, where he fell flat, hugging the dog and trying to warm him with his own body. But the collie didn't stir, the good amber eye remained closed. Then suddenly Luke wanted to act like a resourceful, competent man.

Getting up on his knees, he stretched the dog out on its belly, drew him between his knees, felt with trembling hands for the soft places on the flanks just above the hipbones, and rocked back and forth, pressing with all his weight, then relaxing the pressure as he straightened up. He hoped that he was working the dog's lungs like a bellows. He had read that men who had been thought drowned had been saved in this way.

" Come on, Dan. Come on, old boy," he pleaded softly. As a little water came from the collie's mouth, Luke's heart jumped, and he muttered over and over, " You can't be dead, Dan ! You can't, you can't ! I won't let you die, Dan ! " He rocked back and forth tirelessly, applying the pressure to the flanks. More water dribbled from the mouth. In the collie's body he felt a faint tremor. " Oh, gosh, Dan, you're alive," he whispered. " Come on, boy. Keep it up."

With a cough the collie suddenly jerked his head back, the amber eye opened, and there they were looking at each other. Then the collie, thrusting his legs out stiffly, tried to hoist himself up, staggered, tried again, then stood there in a stupor. He shook himself like any other wet dog, turned his head, eyed Luke, and the red tongue came out in a weak flick at Luke's cheek.

" Lie down, Dan," Luke said. As the dog lay down beside him, Luke closed his eyes, buried his head in the wet fur and wondered why all the muscles of his arms and legs began to jerk in a nervous reaction, now that it was all over.

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" Stay there, Dan," he said softly, and went back to the path, got his shoes and came back beside Dan and put them on. " I think we'd better get away from this spot, Dan," he said. " Keep down, boy. Come on." And he crawled on through the tall grass till they were about seventy five yards from the house. There they lay down together.

In a little while he heard his aunt's voice calling, " Luke. Oh, Luke ! Come here, Luke ! "

" Quiet, Dan," Luke whispered. A few minutes passed, and then Uncle Henry called, " Luke, Luke ! " and he began to come down the path. They could see him standing there, massive and imposing, his hands on his hips as he looked down the path, then he turned and went back to the house.

As he watched the sunlight shine on the back of his uncle's neck, the exultation Luke had felt at knowing the collie was safe beside him turned to bewildered despair, for he knew that even if he should be forgiven for saving the dog when he saw it drowning, the fact was that his uncle had been thwarted. His mind was made up to get rid of Dan, and in a few days' time, in another way, he would get rid of him, as he got rid of anything at the mill that he believed to be useless or a waste of money.

As he lay back and looked up at the hardly moving clouds, he began to grow frightened. He couldn't go back to the house, nor could he take the collie into the woods and hide him and feed him there unless he tied him up. If he didn't tie him up, Dan would wander back to the house.

" I suppose there's just nowhere we can go, Dan," he whispered sadly. " Even if we start off along the road, somebody will see us."

But Dan was watching a butterfly that was circling crazily above them. Raising himself a little, Luke looked through the grass at the corner of the house, then he turned and looked the other way to the wide blue lake. With a sigh he lay down again, and for hours they lay there together, until there was no sound from the saws in the mill and the sun moved low in the western sky.

" Well, we can't stay here any longer, Dan," he said at last. " We'll just have to get as far away as we can. Keep down, old boy," and he began to crawl through the grass, going farther away from the house. When he could no longer be seen, he got up and began to run across the field towards the road leading to town.

On the road, the collie would turn from time to time as if wondering why Luke shuffled along, dragging his feet wearily, his head down. " I'm stumped, that's all, Dan," Luke explained. " I can't seem to think of a place to take you."

When they were passing the Kemp's house they saw the old man sitting in the garden, and Luke stopped. All he could think

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of was that Mr. Kemp had liked them both and it had been a pleasure to help him fetch the cows in the evening. Dan had always been with them. Staring at the figure of the old man in the garden, he said in a worried tone, " I wish I could be sure of him, Dan. I wish he was a dumb, stupid man who wouldn't know or care whether you were worth anything . . . Well, come on." He opened the gate bravely, but he felt shy and unimportant.

" Hello, son. What's on your mind ? " Mr. Kemp called from the lawn. He was a thin, wiry man in a cream coloured shirt. He had a grey, untidy moustache, his skin was wrinkled and leathery, but his eyes were always friendly and amused.

" Could I speak to you, Mr. Kemp ? " Luke asked.

" Of course."

" It's about Dan. He's a great dog, but I expect you know that as well as I do. I was wondering if you could keep him here for me."

" Why should I keep Dan here, son ? "

" Well, it's like this," Luke said, fumbling for words awkwardly : " My uncle won't let me keep him any more . . . says he's too old." His mouth began to tremble, then he blurted out the story.

" I see, I see," Mr. Kemp said slowly, and he got up and began to stroke the collie's head. " Of course, Dan's an old dog, son," he said quietly. " And sooner or later you've got to get rid of an old dog. Your uncle knows that. Perhaps it's true that Dan isn't worth his keep."

" He doesn't eat much, Mr. Kemp. Just one meal a day."

" I wouldn't want you to think your uncle was cruel and unfeeling, Luke," Mr. Kemp went on. " He's a fine man . . . perhaps just a little bit too practical and straightforward."

" I suppose that's it," Luke agreed, but he was really waiting and trusting the expression in the old man's eyes.

" Perhaps you should make him a practial proposition."

" I—I don't know what you mean."

" Well, beginning with the way you get the cows for me in the evenings," Mr. Kemp said, smiling to himself. " In fact, I don't think you need me to go along with you at all. Now, supposing I gave you half-a-crown a week. Would you get the cows in for me every night ? "

" Of course I would, Mr. Kemp. I like doing it, anyway."

" All right, son. It's a deal. Now I'll tell you what to do. Go back to your uncle, and before he has a chance to open up on you, you say right out that you've come to him with a business proposition. Say it like a man, just like that. Offer to pay him the half-a-crown a week for the dog's keep."

" But my uncle doesn't need half-a-crown, Mr. Kemp," Luke said uneasily.

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" Of course not," Mr. Kemp agreed. " It's the principle of the thing. Be confident. Remember that he's got nothing against the dog. Go on, son. Let me know how you do," he added, with an amused smile. " If I know your uncle at all, I think it'll work."

" I'll try it, Mr. Kemp," Luke said. " Thanks very much." But he didn't have any confidence, for even though he knew that Mr. Kemp was a wise old man who would not deceive him, he couldn't believe that half-a-crown a week would stop his uncle, who was an important man. " Come on, Dan," he called, and he went slowly and apprehensively back to the house.

When they were going up the path, his aunt cried from the open window, " Henry, Henry, in heaven's name, it's Luke with Dan ! "

Ten paces from the verandah, Luke stopped and waited nervously for his uncle to come out. Uncle Henry came out in a rush, but when he saw the collie and Luke standing there, he stopped stiffly, turned pale and his mouth hung open loosely.

" Luke," he whispered, " that dog had a stone round his neck."

" I fished him out of the stream," Luke said uneasily.

" Oh. Oh, I see," Uncle Henry said, and gradually the colour came back to his face. " You fished him out, eh ? " he asked, still looking at the dog uneasily. " Well, you shouldn't have done that. I told Sam Carter to get rid of the dog, you know."

" Just a minute, Uncle Henry," Luke said, trying not to falter. He gained confidence as Aunt Helen came out and stood beside her husband, for her eyes seemed to be gentle, and he went on bravely, " I want to make you a practical proposition, Uncle Henry."

" A what ? " Uncle Henry asked, still feeling insecure, and wishing the boy and the dog weren't confronting him.

" A practical proposition," Luke blurted out quickly. " I know Dan isn't worth his keep to you. I don't suppose he's worth anything to anybody but me. So I'll pay you half-a-crown a week for his keep."

" What's this ? " Uncle Henry asked, looking bewildered. " Where would you get half-a-crown a week, Luke ? "

" I'm going to get the cows in every night for Mr. Kemp."

" Oh, for heaven's sake, Henry," Aunt Helen pleaded, looking distressed, " let him keep the dog ! " and she fled into the house.

" None of that kind of talk ! " Uncle Henry called after her. " We've got to be sensible about this ! " But he was shaken himself, and overwhelmed with a distress that destroyed all his confidence. As he sat down slowly in the rocking chair and stroked the side of his big face, he wanted to say weakly, " All right, keep the dog," but he was ashamed of being so weak and sentimental. He stubbornly refused to yield to this emotion ; he was trying desperately to turn his emotion into a bit of good, useful commonsense, so

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he could justify his distress. So he rocked and pondered.

At last he smiled. " You're a smart young fellow, Luke," he said slowly. " Imagine you working it out like this. I'm tempted to accept your proposition."

" Oh, thanks, Uncle Henry."

" I'm accepting it because I think you'll learn something out of this," he went on ponderously. " You'll learn that useless luxuries cost the smartest of men hard-earned money."

" I don't mind."

" Well, it's a thing you'll have to learn sometime. I think you'll learn, too, because you certainly seem to have a practical streak in you. It's a streak I like to see in a boy. All right, son," he said, and he smiled with relief and went into the house.

Turning to Dan, Luke whispered softly, " Well, what do you know about that ? "

As he sat down on the step with the collie beside him and listened to Uncle Henry talking to his wife, he began to glow with exultation. Then gradually his exultation began to change to a vast wonder that Mr. Kemp should have had such a perfect understanding of Uncle Henry. He began to dream of someday being as wise as old Mr. Kemp and knowing exactly how to handle people. It was possible, too, that he had already learned some of the things about his uncle that his father had wanted him to learn.

Putting his head down on the dog's neck, he vowed to himself fervently that he would always have some money on hand, no matter what became of him, so that he would be able to protect all that was truly valuable from the practical people in the world.

* * *

## *ROUNDELAY*

*Puccini was Latin, and Wagner Teutonic,*
*And birds are incurably philharmonic.*
*Suburban yards and rural vistas*
*Are filled with avian Andrews Sisters.*
*The skylark sings a roundelay,*
*The crow sings " The Road to Mandalay,"*
*The nightingale sings a lullaby,*
*And the seagull sings a gullaby.*
*That's what shepherds listened to in Arcadia*
*Before somebody invented the radia.*

OGDEN NASH

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# GEMINI

**"Oh, it sounds incredible," he said, "but you'll see—presently"**

## by G. B. STERN

"LOOK here . . . what *has* become of David Merriman?" They had asked this so often; but just tonight it seemed a good thing to go and find out. For they missed Merriman. They missed his vitality and his good humour, and his preposterous habit of rushing away on bye-issues, whatever subject was under discussion, like a river in full spate.

Until six weeks ago, Merriman was accessible whenever they wanted him, any or all of them; but lately, queer rumours were about; for he had not disappeared, after the fashion of Waring and other mysterious victims of the Wanderlust—

> "*What's become of Waring*
> *Since he gave us all the slip?*" . . .

—Corporeally, he was still present in London, in his rooms; except for one month when he had impulsively left them without giving a clue as to his whereabouts. It was socially that he had given his comrades the slip.

And then, these puzzling reports: "They say he's chucked his job on the *Gazette*. They say he's turned analytical chemist, or something of that sort; they say he's hunting for the elixir of youth as though Vardaroff hadn't already obligingly found it for us; they say he potters about all day and most of the night in his dressing-gown, with a jungle of beard on his face, pouring things out of bottles; they say he smashes the bottles and that his rooms are a heap of broken glass; they say he won't see anyone, that he's looking . . . Oh, they say, they say, and they say . . ."

"Come on. I'm sick of this. Let's go and rout him out; make him dress and shave and spend the evening with us, like a human being."

So Prentice fetched his car from the garage, and they went off in search of David Merriman.

His three friends were anxious about him, in spite of their assumption that all they missed was his rollicking good company. The fourth man did not care. He was a new acquaintance brought

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in casually that night by Johnny Carfax; younger than the others, better dressed and better looking; a handsome youngster with an air of secret adventure, and not too scrupulous adventure at that! —You could imagine his wearing a coat slung round his shoulders without putting his arms into the sleeves—that type of man! A man of easy conquest. He seemed amused at all this fuss about David Merriman. A sneer hung on his lips:

"If the poor beggar wants to be left alone to smash medicine bottles . . ." For he was reluctant to be hauled out of Prentice's comfortable rooms, having once been brought there. It was a blowy night, the whisky was good, and what did Merriman matter, anyway?

"Why not ring up?" he suggested, lazily.

But the others took no notice. He was the youngest, and a stranger—a rather impudent stranger—and they did not want strangers; they wanted Merriman back again. Johnny Carfax wondered why he had bothered at all with young Theo Strake?

What *was* the matter with David?

His rooms were in the City; a deserted city that night; all the empty streets were full of wind, instead of the usual hustle and crowd. Merriman's rooms were at the top of the house. They banged and banged at the door, and nobody answered. Then suddenly came a crash—and a sombre trickle under the door. It was too melodramatic to be true; and Theo Strake laughed at the white faces of his companions.

"*That's* not blood," he said, in scoffing reassurance. "I've seen a lot of blood. Smell it if you doubt me. It's—yes, vermouth; Cinzano."

. . . But Prentice had lost his head, and was pounding at the panels of the door as though he hoped to smash them. Then suddenly the door flew open, and there stood Merriman, looking like a conventional illustration of the weird stories they had heard about him; looking like Lucifer fallen from Heaven with a crash. He was unshaven, and wore his dressing-gown and slippers. But his aspect was hollow and hunted and wild, beyond these mere externals. Nor did he seem as pleased at the sight of his visitors as might have been expected from a man of such genial temperament.

"Do you want to come in?" he asked, abruptly.

"Don't be a fool, Merriman!" cried Carfax impatiently. "Do you suppose we want to stop outside and shout through the door? If you've got something to hide, sling it in the cupboard, quick: him or her or it. We'll give you fifty seconds' grace."

Merriman shrugged his shoulders. "I've got something to find; nothing to hide."

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" Missing Will ? "

He grinned impishly, more like the old David they were familiar with. " Missing cocktail . . ." he said. " Come in, come in ! I'm not so sure that I'm sorry to see you. This room is mouldy with enigmas, and I'm sick of groping for the solution. If you wanted to get to Hungary, Johnny, how would you do it ? Would you go to the station and take a ticket ? Would you go by train and boat and train again ? Would you ? Well, that's just what I can't do, you see. Oh, the splendid insolent simplicity of going to the station and taking a ticket ! And here I am—stuck ! I tell you, it's driving me mad ! "

Mad ? . . . The unswept floor of the room was piled high with bottles ; so were the tables, chairs and shelves. Glasses and broken glasses were littered everywhere ; and glasses half-full of pale liquids, colourless or faintly gold, dimly green, deep winking evil red.

David Merriman, standing in the midst of this fantastic wreckage, this confusion of alchemy, standing there, a despairing djinn in a dressing-gown, brandishing his arms and shouting : " Open Sesame ! —Blast you ! Open ! " to an invisible box-office that was to take him to Hungary, and left him in the City of London . . . What did it all mean ? It was quite incredible, and quite incredibly idiotic.

" You'd better tell us about it, David," Carfax suggested, gently. He and Prentice and Richardson were rather wishing that the new fellow were not looking on at this spectacle of a disintegrated Merriman.

" Look here," Richardson pointed out, for his spirit was the most laborious in the group. " Look here, you know, Merriman, if you want to go to Hungary—and it beats me why anyone should ! —If you want to go . . . Look here, why the devil don't you let Cook or Lunn or one of those fellows fix you up ? I suppose you're after a woman over there ?—dark and gipsyish, aren't they ? Not my type . . . But sitting about, and turning down your friends, and drinking too much, won't take you far."

Their host burst into a shout of laughter. " Won't take me far ! " he cried . . . And his arms involuntarily described a series of motions familiar to all of them : the flamboyant rhythm of cocktail shaking, in the air and without implements. So that Carfax shuddered at the grotesque spectacle ; and he crunched a way over to the window, bits of glass snapping under his feet ; there at any rate he could look out ; need not watch the spectral pantomime by the ghost of a once sane and witty Merriman.

" —Won't take me *far ?* But I tell you, it'll take me farther, when I succeed, *if* I succeed, than all your Cooks and your Lunns

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and your *wagon-lits!* It'll take me as far as I want to go: As far as Heaven and Hungary . . . And, oh, Horace, you chump, do you really suppose I'm drinking too much just for the sake of getting drunk?"

Suddenly, he seemed to realize that Carfax, whom he had always liked best of the three, was definitely unhappy about him. "All right, Johnny, all right, all right—I'll tell you. Then you can judge. Horace won't believe a word of what I say, and it'll be good fun watching Horace not believing me—best fun I've had for weeks. I'm not sure that I believe myself . . .

"You know, in the summer, I was rambling about Central Europe? I stuck to the smaller places and didn't go near Prague or Budapest or any of the capitals; hadn't got the clothes, for one thing. At a village in the Carpathians, St. Rudigund, the host of the pub asked me to try some home-grown Slivovitz; not his own vintage but his father's. It was pretty old, he said. He only had a few bottles left.

"It was unusual stuff, not too sweet, with a haunting flavour of plum running through it. I wanted a bottle to take home with me. In fact, it was to be a little present for Horace . . . The old fellow made me pay such a thumping price that I decided not to give it to Horace, after all.

"When I got home—do you remember that night when I gave a dinner, and wasn't there?"

Prentice nodded. He had been one of the guests. And that had been the beginning of Merriman's oddness; the beginning of eccentric rumour . . .

"I was going to mix the cocktails and have 'em ready, just before any of you turned up, when it struck me that I might invent a new one with a strain of Slivovitz in it.

"So I opened the bottle, and shook up one glassful, for myself, just to try it; it was by way of an experiment. I didn't put in more than a dash of the Slivovitz . . .

". . . And there I was, drinking it at a table in a cabaret in some foreign town. There were gipsies playing, the real Tzigane; and I thought at once that it might be Hungary; Budapest, probably. I recognized that sort of naked piano instrument they have, striking at the bars with two little balled sticks.

"No, *no*, it wasn't a magic carpet or any obvious wizardry like that. I didn't fall asleep and dream, or fly through the air. I was just *there*—there and not here. It's simple enough. You believe a lot of more absurd things every day of your life, Horace, only you're used to them. You simply wouldn't *believe* the things that you believe!

"There I was, and not at all surprised. It was one of those

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pleasantly irresponsible cafés where you couldn't take your sister, and wouldn't if you could. Bawdy and expensive and picturesque. Well patronised, too.

" Gipsy music slithers about the room like shining water; you can't gather it up, or remember it afterwards, but at the time it does make you feel a glorious beast!

" I told you that there were no women there, didn't I? The name of the café was *Kiss Ludo.* I saw it upside down over the entrance. Not a joke. Kisses are common in Hungary—*Kiss Ludo;* the surname first. Presently, they brought in three enormous trays with huge silver dish-covers over them; everybody applauded when the covers were whisked off—three girls lying thigh-deep in flowers! *You'd* have applauded, Horace—"

Here Merriman glared at Theo Strake, as though he had only just perceived that there was an intruder, and disliked him fiercely on sight. " Yes, the usual Continental cabaret surprise. But really pretty girls. One of them—" he dropped his voice . . . And again his hands described the mechanical motion of shaking a cocktail, as though they had done it for so long that now they acted without his volition.

" One of them was lovely. She reminded me of the Kirchners we used to tack up on the walls of our huts at the beginning of the war, do you remember? Swift and young and roguish. Delectable . . . ! Fair bobbed hair, very round and shining, like a golden apple. She leaped off her tray, scattering flowers, and ran, light-footed, straight to me; yes, straight over to my table, and knelt on the chair beside me. My word, I was flattered!

" She spoke a little French, about as much as I did. Waiting till the room was full of noise and music, she murmured:

" ' Take me back. I am frightened. I like you, I love you, but I am frightened.'

" ' Take you back where? ' I asked.

" I was thunderstruck when she answered: ' Back to school! '

" School she added, was about thirty miles out of Budapest, on the plain. She couldn't quite explain to me—her French was too limited, or mine was!—how she came to be on the tray and under the dish-cover, in the *Café of Kiss Ludo.* It didn't seem to me a normal position for any pupil at a Young Ladies' Seminary, but I gathered that it was a joke; that she had wanted to see life; that she was bored at school; and that she had changed places with one Marishka, whose name occurred several times in the story; that now she had had enough of the joke, and please would I take her back? ' I like you, I love you, I am frightened '—this was her refrain.

" I wondered how she would have got out of her scrape if she had

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found no one to like or love with quite so much cherubic confidence that the liking would be returned, and the love—wouldn't. Well . . . There's a dash of Rudolf Rassendyll in us all!

"I picked up the little beauty; hoisted her on to my shoulder, and staggered out with her, swaggering and shouting as though she were my legitimate prize. That being presumed, nobody stopped us. The other two girls were left behind, and those gipsies were fiddling away like mad . . . Their music was the incoming tide, dark and flowing.

"We splashed through, and out into the street. Two or three cars were waiting on the cobbles, and I told her to bribe any driver of them—I couldn't speak their language, and she could!—to take her out to wherever her school was. Of what I should say to the headmistress—the headmistress, mark you!—I hadn't the remotest idea. I don't know now what I would have said if there had been a headmistress; only there wasn't, as you'll see presently.

"She was still wearing her Kirchner-Girl costume, a sort of cowslip coloured tunic of thin silk; so I wrapped her in my overcoat. We drove for nearly two hours over those mournful Hungarian plains that are velvety purple by day, decorated with tall yellow sunflowers and fat white geese. They spread like heart-break to the horizon . . . No end to them. But of course, this was night, and I couldn't see where we were going.

"She snuggled down into my arms, and slept. It's time that somebody disproved the continental legend of the 'cold English.' . . . Darn silly legend!

"At last we drew up at some tall iron gates, obviously the entrance to quite a big garden, if not an estate.

"'I know my way now,' said Carla. She had told me her name. And then: 'Goodbye. Thank you!' And put up her face to be kissed—the scamp!

"'Shall I see you again?'

"'It depends!' She was poised, ready to be off.

"'Depends on *what?*' I was in a blue funk that I should lose her altogether, while I waited for her answer.

"Which, incidentally, I never got, because by then, I was back here again.

"No, I can't tell you how it happened. It's no good asking me. I just know that I didn't wake up, or tumble down the chimney, or drift in on a moonbeam. Nothing of that sort. If the magic worked by any talisman—and it didn't seem like magic, it was all much too natural—but if it had a talisman, it was the cocktail . . . because I was still tightly grabbing the empty glass.

"How long had I been away? Yes, I thought you'd ask that.

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I had been away for exactly the amount of time I hadn't been here—not allowing for a journey out to Hungary and back. I must have been about an hour in the café, and about an hour and three-quarters in the car; and I left at—let me see, for what time had I invited you to dinner, Prentice? Eight o'clock? And I was getting the cocktail ready at, say, a quarter to eight. It was twenty to eleven when the adventure shrank up and ended. And here I stood, gaping, with the glass in my hand, and Carla's clear laugh still in my ears, and not a blessed idea how I could get back to her!

"It was a week before it dawned on me that the bottle of Slivovitz might have had something to do with it. So I dressed as carefully as a bridegroom—for I might be going to see Carla again at any moment! and I drank some Slivovitz, neat. You would have laughed if you had seen the way my hand trembled when I poured it out. I spilt quite a lot of it on the table.

"And then, you know, I didn't budge! Nothing whatever happened! You'd have laughed still more to see me standing there expecting to be whisked off somehow into the fourth dimension in Hungary; but instead standing on and on at my own dining room table!

"I racked my memory for every story of enchantment that I had ever read; and I came to the conclusion that each detail had got to be exactly the same—to make the same spell work in the same way, and to the same end.

"So I waited till it was a quarter to eight, and I mixed myself exactly the same cocktail—I remembered the ingredients, because I had been rather precise about them, on that first occasion. I wanted to impress Dicky Foster, who's inclined to be swollen-headed about his private recipes.

"I drank . . .

"It was all right, this time. I was back again in Hungary. No, not in exactly the same place; but in some sort of great hall in a castle. Indeed—because I needn't bother you with my discoveries in proper sequence!—I learnt afterwards that it was the inside instead of the outside of Carla's 'School.' School?—The little devil! It was no more a school than this house is a school. It was her husband's country seat; and he was a count or a field-marshal—or both. At any rate, his servants saluted him.

"Carla appeared, presently. She came into the hall, where I sat disconsolate, looking at the great antlered beasts on the walls, and wondering where the hell I was this time, and what was going to happen next? She came down the carved staircase, very much the grande dame, very decorous, and very decorative; and told me politely how glad she was to welcome me, and how sorry that her

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husband was away hunting.

" It was an unsatisfactory evening, on the whole. For she remained chilly ; not in the least like the *gamine* whom I had seen carried on a tray in a heap of roses. She was so frigid that I hardly dared remind her of that escapade; nor ask her why she had played the trick on me, of pretending that she was still a schoolgirl when she was a wife ? But at last, I did call up enough courage. She frowned at first, bewildered and angry. Then a gleam of light broke through—a very pale gleam.

" ' That must have been my wicked little sister, Carla. My twin sister. I am Zena, not Carla. We are so alike that it is difficult to tell us apart.'

" ' Is she,' I enquired, my heart thumping, ' is she in the castle now ? '

" ' Yes, she lives with me. I would like to have left her longer at school, but they would not have her. She is too naughty and wild. So we are going to marry her quickly to a friend of my husband's.'

" After that, she wouldn't speak of Carla any more. I paid her compliments in stilted French. But Zena, who was, more formally, the Countess Janoschoza, didn't like me ; or, if she did, she was too virtuous to show it. So she kept me in my place . . . I might have been a vassal ; they are feudal, those Hungarians ! I was given refreshments ; shown pictures. And still I sat there, longing and longing for Carla to come in. I didn't see Carla that time . . .

" How in God's name did they account for me ? I couldn't account for myself, certainly. But all the people I met took me for granted.

" Back I came, to these rooms of mine. Ten o'clock was striking. Forty minutes less than my last allowance of Paradise. The cocktail might have been slightly smaller.

" You can imagine, can't you, how I spent my time after that. I dared not keep on going back and back. Suppose I used up all my time, and that precious bottle of Slivovitz, on long sedate, amiable conversations with the Countess Zena, who was so like my wicked little love, Carla ? So pretty, and so strikingly alike, but in behaviour how different !

" But I did see Carla again, on my fifth visit to the castle. By then, I was getting desperate. On my fifth visit, I saw Carla, and not Zena. Carla was as provocative and as impetuous as ever—and as fond of me. She only laughed when I demanded, with as much fierceness as I could, how she had dared make me her buffoon on our last encounter ?

" ' It was fun ! ' she cried.

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" In my between-times here in London, in these rooms—for they only counted as between-times now—my new life, the life that mattered, was away on that fantastic bit of existence that had got loose and was floating about!—but in my between-times, I was trying to learn Hungarian, so that I could reach a more enlightened understanding with the twin sisters, than by paying compliments to Zena, or kissing Carla.

" Have you ever tried to learn Hungarian, any of you? It's worse than Chinese. Somehow, when it came to the point, however much I swotted, I could never remember any more than *hideg* and *meleg*, hot and cold. ' Hot ' meant Carla, and ' cold ' was Zena, and I got no forrader, and the Slivovitz was sinking in its bottle. Not a wine-merchant in London had a bottle of the stuff on the place.

" I consoled myself by planning that, of course, the minute I had finished it, I could go out to Hungary properly, in a decent normal fashion, and stay there as long as I liked. It would be easy enough to search out the café in Budapest where I had begun my adventures, and easy enough to discover the castle of Count Janoschoza.

" Nevertheless, I was beginning to get worried—lots of things were worrying me . . I never saw the twins together; that was odd. And then, neither of the sisters seemed curious about my spasmodic comings and goings; and I couldn't explain them. The whole affair was so incredible, and none of us knew enough French; and I wasn't there long enough; and I wanted Carla with me always.

" I had a horrible notion that Carla might equally have said, to whatever strange man had shot in on a cocktail, so to speak: ' I like you, I love you, I am frightened! ' Supposing I lost the trick of re-entrance! Supposing the power went to somebody else; somebody better looking, more—more dashing, than myself? And at the mere idea of such a rival . . .

" Oh, well, it's no good raving!

" My paper gave me the sack at about that time. They said I was growing too absent minded. That was literally the matter with me—absent minded! Soul and mind and heart were absent, and only my reluctant body dragging about here in London.

" When I made my cocktail with the last of the Slivovitz—a bigger dose than usual!—I reckoned it would carry me over to the fourth dimension or wherever it was, for about four hours. I had quite decided that this time I would contrive to make a definite appointment with Carla, only coming into Hungary the right way round, the real way.

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" But I forgot !

" You'll hardly credit that. But if you'd had the same revelation . . . you'd have forgotten. It knocked everything else to blazes.

" The revelation was just this : there were no twins ; Carla was Zena, and Zena was Carla ; and she thought she was twins. It was her delusion.

" No wonder I had never seen them together ! They had each talked so convincingly of ' my sister ' : Zena a trifle wistfully, as though regretting that little Carla was so wild and unmanageable and did such freakish things ; and Carla, of Zena, rebelliously, a pout on her lips, her eyes sullen ; Zena was so staid. She had married a year ago, when she was only seventeen ! And Zena was so good ; she never did anything bad ; she would not even betray her husband, she ! . . .

" I was told about this—this gemini complex, by a charming elderly Hungarian who spoke English, and whom I met there that night, at a dinner party to which I didn't in the least want to go, only I had been tipped into the middle of it at somewhere round the third course, so that I couldn't very well rise and walk out. But my hours were too precious to waste in this fashion, and I sat there hating my neighbour, and wondering where Carla was ? Where did she always hide herself ? Surely she would be present, knowing that I worshipped her ! that I was crazy for her !—crazy as Tzigane music stealing at night over the plains . . .

" Zena sat at the head of the table. She smiled at me very graciously, but I knew she didn't like me. I guessed the elderly gentleman who spoke English to be the friend of Count Janoschoza, for whom they destined Carla, because she was ripe for marriage. Ripe . . . at eighteen, continental fashion ! If only I had carried her off that first time, instead of bringing her home to her sister . . . to herself ! But I had been too dazed to realize what I should have done ; and now I was too helpless and hemmed in—hemmed in by that exacting duenna, a bottle of Slivovitz ! What a position for a lover !

" If I could only see Carla again, and get her well started for England by the time my spell had stopped its work—And then meet her at the other end—You see what I mean, don't you ? No, of course you don't . . . Horace looks as though he'd like to take my temperature !

" The Tokay Aszúbor—seventy years old—was put on the table with the dessert ; and the ladies withdrew to the drawing room. They were very formal, these assemblies at the castle. It was then that I dropped into conversation with the only man present who could speak English—my rival, as I rather melodramatically termed him in my mind.

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" He said : ' Do you not think our hostess is very beautiful ? '

" I answered, daring him : ' Yes, but not so beautiful as her sister, her twin sister.'

" And then he told me.

" I was not as surprised as you might have supposed. Subconsciously, I already had my suspicions. I had never once seen them together. It had always been Carla or Zena ; never Carla *and* Zena.

" Where I cursed my luck was that so often, by some whimsical irony, I met the Zena side of Carla, who was cold and virtuous and a little antagonistic ; and so rarely, so very rarely, had I the good fortune to arrive just at the propitious moment to meet the Carla side of Zena . . .

" I vowed grimly that I would wait no longer, but that the very next time Carla was uppermost—well, the Carla delusion, then ; I don't care how you put it !—I would take what the cocktail gods had sent me. I didn't mind. The child had a husband, a protector. I needed to mind when I had thought of her as the little sister—the delicious urchin who looked up wide-eyed at the stranger from England, and said : ' I like you, I love you ! '

" I strolled out into the garden, after dinner. That Tokay was heavy, rich and cloying. While we sipped it, the Count clapped his hands, and got his gipsy band in, to play for us. So my pulses were racing that night !

" Down by the iron gates where I had first left Carla, I met her again—on the inside, this time. She was, of course, wearing the same dress she had been wearing when she had sat as Zena at the head of her table. But I knew she was not Zena any more, for she ran straight into my arms.

. . . " At that moment, the devils dropped me back here. I don't know who they are, or what they are, or why they do it, but damn them ! The devils ! They know I can't get back to her . . . *Damn* them !

" I never saw her again. Though I went straight out to Hungary, by train and boat and train, I couldn't find the *Café of Kiss Ludo.* There are dozens of Kisses—all up the streets of Budapest. The name is as common as Smith in England. But just this one café didn't exist. Nor, as far as I could discover, did the castle of Count Janoschoza exist ; not on the normal and conscious plane, anyway. I circled Budapest at a radius of twenty and thirty and forty miles, like a hound casting. I went nearly frantic. I made enquiries everywhere.

. . . " But all that world, and all those people who dwelt in it, they couldn't be reached in the direct way. Perhaps they had no

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independent existence apart from an unholy cocktail.

"I wasn't going to give up Carla, though. Obviously, the next thing to be done, was to go to St. Rudigund, in the Carpathians, and get a good supply of Slivovitz—all that I could persuade the innkeeper to let me buy. It didn't matter what it cost—if it cost every penny I owned, Carla was worth it. Not Zena, you understand, who adored her husband, but *Carla*. And our meetings had only been one in seven! If I had had any sense of humour left, that would have amused me!

"At St. Rudigund, the old chap I knew had died, and his successor at the inn had drunk all the remaining Slivovitz except seven bottles. I paid a fantastic price for these, because I simply couldn't bother to hide my eagerness. Then I rushed home. I dared not risk starting off from any other place, in case it would only work using the same room, the same table, the same glass, the same shaker. Carla was waiting, and somebody else might come along—she was like a fruit near its perfect hour . . . One tap would knock it to the ground.

"Carla! . . . If you'd heard my heart thump as I sloshed in the ingredients, careful not to waste the Slivovitz, shook up the cocktail, poured it out, and drank it . . . Carla . . . Carla . . .

"Again, not a thing happened. I stopped where I was.

"After the first shock of disappointment, it struck me that the cocktail hadn't tasted quite the same. Either the quality in one of the bottles, or the proportions were different. How much gin had I put in before? And just how much French Vermouth? I hardly used any Italian, the Slivovitz made that unnecessary. A spot of lemon; a dash of bitters . . . Well, but a slack estimate of spots and dashes wasn't good enough.

"I had to remember exactly. It tasted wrong. I knew the right shade and flavour, as it ought to be, but this agitated tearing round Europe had shaken my memory. How much of the French Vermouth? How much gin? Did I jerk the Angostura twice or three times through the dropper?"

"It was no good," David Merriman finished, morosely. "I've been at it ever since. No good. I've almost given up."

During the latter part of his tale, he had been mechanically pouring out liquids from the bottles on the table, as though he could not stop doing it, now: as though he would have to go on mixing cocktails all his life, till perhaps accident should slant him obliquely on to the recipe he had forgotten.

The men who listened to the story noticed a dark plum coloured bottle, square in shape, with no label on it. He poured out all that was left of it, tilting it upside down as he did so.

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Then, in a sudden fury, he shook and shook and shook at the cocktail, holding the shaker high above his head, still with that hopeless rhythm of movement, as though he neither knew nor cared any more what would be the result, but was forced by some goblin Council of Ten to go on shaking cocktails for their amusement.

Finally, noticing with listless amusement what he had been doing, he poured out the mixture, and nonchalantly passed the glass to Johnny Carfax.

" Try it ? " he suggested. " It's the only refreshment I can offer you. It's about the hundred and seventh of a long line. I shall have to chuck it now, as there's no Slivovitz left ; and Horace, bless his kind heart, can remove me quickly to a lunatic asylum."

Carfax said : " Not in my line, thanks. I don't mind a glass of sherry, but cocktails—" He shook his head, and passed on his glass to young Strake, who was nearest.

" Good luck ! " cried Theo Strake, and drank it off.

*And they all stared at the space where he had been standing.*

* * *

## *TALISMAN*

Horace Greeley, a famous editor of the *New York Tribune*, was noted in his day for having about the most illegible handwriting of any man known. Sometimes he could not even read it himself.

One day he wrote an editorial that the printer could barely understand, and as it was handed in just before the paper went to press, it contained, when printed, some ludicrous errors. When Greeley read it, he fussed and fumed and tore his hair, and then sacked the compositor on the spot. In fact he was so enraged that he wrote a note to the man denouncing him for his stupidity.

The compositor could not read the note, but he went round to the office of a rival newspaper and asked for a job.

" Have you any recommendations ? " asked the foreman.

" Sure," said the man. " I've got a letter from Mr. Greeley." And he produced the note in which Mr. Greeley called him every kind of name.

The foreman glanced at it, but of course he couldn't read the handwriting. Greeley however was Greeley, and not lightly to be denied. " That's good enough for me," he said. " You can start tomorrow morning."

*Magazine Digest*

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# SWING HIGH, SWING LOW

**I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning**

*Book of Proverbs*

*What thing is love? I pray thee tell, I pray thee tell.*
*It is a prickle, it is a prickle, it is a sting.*
*It is a pretty, pretty thing.*
*It is a fire, it is a coal*
*Whose flame creeps in at every hole,*
*And as my wits can best devise*
*Love's darling lies in ladies' eyes.*

GEORGE PEELE, 1558–1597

## *Down The Garden Path*

She felt the deep, heavy, powerful stroke of his heart. It was like something from beyond, something awful from outside, signalling to her. And the signal paralysed her. It beat upon her very soul, and made her helpless.

The boy put his arm round her waist. " Come with me," he said gently. " Come and let us say what we've got to say."

And he drew her outside. She went with him darkly down the garden path. That he should have a beating heart! And that he should have his arm round her, outside the blanket! She was too confused to think.

He took her to a dark corner of the shed, where there was a toolbox with a lid, long and low.

" We'll sit here a minute," he said. And obediently she sat down by his side.

" Give me your hand," he said.

She gave him both her hands, and he held them between his own. He was young, and it made him tremble.

He had put her in the corner, so that she should not look out and see the lighted window of the house, across the dark yard and garden. He tried to keep her all there inside the shed with him.

They sat for some time silent. He held her hands in his, but he did not make love to her. Since he had realized that she was a woman, and vulnerable, accessible, a certain heaviness had possessed his soul. He did not want to make love to her. He shrank from any such performance, almost with fear. She was a woman, and

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vulnerable, accessible to him finally, and he held back from that which was ahead, almost with dread. It was a kind of darkness he knew he would enter finally, but of which he did not want as yet even to think. She was the woman, and he was responsible for the strange vulnerability he had suddenly realized in her.

When the curious passion began to die down, he seemed to come awake to the world.

" We'll go in, shall we ? " he said : as if he realized it was cold.

She rose without answering.

" Kiss me before we go," he said.

And he kissed her gently on the mouth, with a young, frightened kiss. It made her feel so young, too, and frightened, and wondering : and tired, tired as if she were going to sleep.

D. H. LAWRENCE, 1885–1930, *The Fox*

## *Sweet Fever*

*Even now*
*My thought is all of this gold-tinted king's daughter*
*With garlands tissue and golden buds,*
*Smoke tangles of her hair, and sleeping or waking*
*Feet trembling in love, full of pale languor ;*

*Even now*
*If I see in my soul the citron-breasted fair one*
*Still gold-tinted, her face like our night stars,*
*Drawing unto her ; her body beaten about with flame,*
*Wounded by the flaring spear of love,*
*My first of all by reason of her fresh years,*
*Then is my heart buried alive in snow.*

*If my girl with lotus eyes came to me again*
*Weary with the dear weight of young love,*
*Again I would give her to these starved twins of arms*
*And from her mouth drink down the heavy wine,*
*As a reeling pirate bee in fluttered ease*
*Steals up the honey from the nenuphar.*

*If I saw her lying all wide eyes*
*And with collyrium the indent of her cheek*
*Lengthened to the bright ear and her pale side*
*So suffering the fever of my distance,*
*Then would my love for her be ropes of flowers, and night*
*A black-haired lover on the breasts of day.*

*Translated by* E. POWYS MATHERS,
*from the Sanskrit of Chaurus, 1st Century,* A.D.

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## *So Green, So Green*

At length, Fate being propitious, we meet at the dancing-school. I have Miss Shepherd for my partner. I touch Miss Shepherd's glove, and feel a thrill go up the right arm of my jacket, and come out at my hair. I say nothing tender to Miss Shepherd, but we understand each other. Miss Shepherd and myself live but to be united.

Why do I secretly give Miss Shepherd twelve Brazil nuts for a present, I wonder? They are not expressive of affection, they are difficult to pack into a parcel of any regular shape, they are hard to crack, even in room doors, and they are oily when cracked; yet I feel that they are appropriate to Miss Shepherd. Soft, seedy biscuits, also, I bestow upon Miss Shepherd; and oranges innumerable. Once, I kiss Miss Shepherd in the cloakroom . . .

CHARLES DICKENS, 1812–1870, *David Copperfield*

## *Sir, She Said*

*Too high, too high to pluck*
*My heart shall swing.*
*A fruit no bee shall suck,*
*No wasp shall sting.*

*If on some night of cold*
*It falls to ground*
*In apple-leaves of gold*
*I'll wrap it round.*

*And I shall seal it up*
*With spice and salt,*
*In a carven silver cup,*
*In a deep vault.*

*But I shall keep it sweet*
*By some strange art;*
*Wild honey I shall eat*
*When I eat my heart.*

ELINOR WYLIE

## *Curtain*

"And sometimes we look to the end of the tale that there should be marriage-feasts, and find only, as it were, black marigolds and a silence."

AZEDDIN EL MOCADECCI

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# NIGHT CALL

**It was always the person you least expected—always!**

## by J. PRISE

HER friends often asked, " Linda, aren't you afraid to stay alone at night ? " And she always laughed and said, " Who, me ! "

Some women might have been afraid. Some women in her place would have given up the house after the divorce. But it was such a right little house, even if it was the last on a dead-end lane, with a long stretch of grass between her and the nearest neighbour, with a vacant plot opposite, even if the big old fir tree had a way of knocking on the roof when there was a wind.

She had watched the house take shape from a scribbling block, had sat on the running board of the car and watched while they dug the foundations. Five rooms and a bath—a doll's house Howard had called it. Every picture on the wall, every tricky built-in shelf, the rugs, the position of the piano, the oak panelled entrance hall—all were of her choosing. Sometimes she wondered if she had not married the house instead of Howard. It had come about so casually. They had driven down the dead-end lane accidentally. While he was turning the car at the foot of the hill, she had said, " Listen, Howard—the wind in those fir trees. It sounds like water." And he had nodded to the sign across, *This Lot for Sale.*

" Like to build here ? " he had asked.

" By those beautiful firs ? Oh, yes ! "

" When ? "

" Oh, soon as I get a rise . . ." She was being facetious, of course. But next day he had shown her the deed to the lot. It had been a proposal.

Evenings in the little house were spent wondering if she would ever understand this moody man, and she would watch him reading and ask herself, " Why did I marry him ? " The attraction of opposites, she would rationalize, or . . . it was the mother instinct in me, she would say. I thought I could make him happy. I thought he needed me. But Howard had not belonged in the little house any more than he belonged to her.

After two years she had faced it. It wouldn't work out. He would never change, and if she continued with him, *she* would.

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Hard to tell her friends why they had parted. One could not say, "I never knew what he was thinking," or, "He wouldn't talk. I felt locked out." Polished, intellectual, always faultlessly groomed, with a faint air of disillusionment that played up his lean handsomeness, Howard would have no trouble finding someone else. Oddly, the thought gave her no pain.

Four months, now, they had been divorced; four months she had lived alone. The house had seemed not to miss him much after his departure, and with her work as a commercial artist in a successful advertising agency, neither had she—too much.

It would have been unthinkable to uproot all her lovely possessions, to transplant them in some stuffy flat. Flats had a dry boxed-up smell, but the little house smelled of lilac and of grass wet with rain, of hyacinth and roses in summer, of cedar when the cold months came.

Naturally a woman alone felt uneasy sometimes when she awakened in the night and heard a board creak somewhere, or when moonlight and shadow made the clothing she had tossed over a chair look like something that crouched. But she had only to stretch out her hand and switch on the bedside lamp, and she kept the telephone on the table beside her bed. No, she had never been afraid, really, until the third time.

The first time the telephone rang at four o'clock in the morning she felt only the startle, only a hint of apprehension. There was something about a telephone ringing in the night. It flooded her mind with grim recollections—of the time it had announced her brother's death in a car crash—of the time it had said, "Linda, come home. Your grandmother is asking for you." Nothing good had come of it—ever.

Her brain fogged with sleep, she picked up the receiver and said, "Hello." When no one answered, she again said, "Hello." It seemed odd no one should answer when the hum of the dial tone was absent. She put the receiver back on the hook, sat up in bed, thinking for a few minutes, deciding to write to her mother more often, turned over and went to sleep.

The next night it rang at three thirty.

"Hello!" she said sharply. And when no one spoke in reply, "What number are you calling?" She thought she heard a faint sighing sound but could not be sure. Puzzled, apprehensive, she hung up.

The third night she read in bed until one thirty. It had not been a good choice, a chilling mystery too realistic for comfort. I shouldn't read such trash, she thought irritably. She went towards the kitchen to fetch a drink of water, and her chest went light and

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fluttery when the curtains billowed out into the room. Although she was not a coward, she shut her windows and locked them—in August.

At five minutes to four the shrilling of the telephone echoed through her bedroom. She was awake instantly for she had never been soundly asleep. " Yes ? " she said quickly. " Hello ! " Before no one answered she knew no one would answer.

It was then apprehension became fear, as a shadow seen to be part of a tree glides from the tree and is more. It was then she heard it—a deep heavy breath exhaled into the telephone. The flesh prickled on her arms and bare shoulders. The receiver became slippery in her hand. She strained forward, listening. She heard whoever it was draw in another long breath and exhale, heard him cough softly.

" Listen ! " she said, and fear sparkled through the anger in her voice. " I don't know who you are, but I don't think it's very clever to wake someone up in the middle of the night if you can't answer ! "

Only the breathing again.

She banged down the receiver and stared at the telephone, black and shiny in the soft glow of the lamplight. Although the room was close to the point of stickiness, she pulled up the sheet for warmth.

Somewhere in the sleeping town, in one of the thousands and thousands of dark buildings, someone had her on his mind.

She got out of bed and prowled through the house, checking the front door, the side door, and the back door in the kitchen. She lit a cigarette, sat on the sofa, knees drawn up.

If she were going to phone someone night after night, why would she be doing it ? To create fear ? Or to be sure the person was home alone ? If she were going to call someone and would not answer, why wouldn't she ? Because she wouldn't want the person to recognize her voice.

The breathing. Only the breathing to let her know he was there.

Swiftly she ground out her cigarette, clicked off the lamp, ran on tiptoe across the room, closed the hall door to shut out the bedroom light. The room in blackness, she lifted a corner of the curtain.

The leaves of the lilac glistened and shook in the moonlight. She waited. A cat bounded from the bush and streaked across the lawn.

She let out her held breath in a long quivering sigh and at the sound her imagination brought *The Breather* into the pitch-black room to stand behind her shoulder.

She let go of the curtain and groped frantically for the lamp

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switch, sank on the sofa, one hand pressed where the drenched silk of her nightdress clung to her breast.

" You silly little fool ! " she said aloud. " It's probably only a prank ! " She struck a match and the flame bobbed crazily as she lit another cigarette. She began to go over the men she knew.

It was preposterous even to consider Howard. Why, he had been the one who had wanted her to move to a flat—so she'd be safe ! " You're too young and pretty to live in a house alone," he had said. And he had been so insistent. No, he *hadn't* wanted the divorce, but he hadn't protested either. " I want only your happiness, Linda," he had said. It was ridiculous even to consider Howard !

There was that new copywriter at the agency where she worked. The girls said he had a crush on her, but he was such a skimmed-milk creature, pathetically eager to be one of them. And the way he blushed when they teased him sometimes. Imagine *him* trying to scare her !

No, there really wasn't anyone.

As the first greyness of dawn rimmed the drawn curtains, she went through the house, drawing back each curtain, opening wide the windows, then crawled into bed.

In the morning, with the windows open, and the coffee steaming on the stove ; with the sun slanting bright across the dining room table and the thrushes singing in the lilac bushes, it seemed scarcely anything.

She changed from her housecoat into her grey linen suit, closed and locked the windows, backed the car out of the garage and drove to work.

That afternoon when, sitting having tea at the *The Green Pantry*, she told Ruth, her assistant, about the phone calls and when Ruth said, " Probably someone's crazy idea of a joke," it still seemed scarcely anything.

And foreboding was no more than nerves in the busy atmosphere of the office, in the nimble exchange of banter. When she looked at Sandy, the pinched new copywriter, she thought, Oh lord !

She and Ruth stayed out for dinner and went to a film. They had rissoles and coffee after the show.

" I wish I *could* go home with you," Ruth said, " but mother's been having those heart palpitations again. I'd better not."

It was not until she turned down her lane that night and passed the last street lamp that *The Breather* seemed real and close.

She did not put her car in the garage. Instead she left it in the drive and made a mental note to get someone to cut down the

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rhododendron bushes. It was foolish to have bushes so close to a garage.

She got out her key and entered the house through the back door. And locked it.

She turned on the kitchen light, the dining room light, then the sitting room light. And stood very still, sucking in her lower lip, her heart skidding. The sitting room window was wide open and the curtains were blowing across the sofa.

Without turning her head she slid her eyes cautiously towards the half-open hall door that led to the waiting darkness of the bedroom beyond.

The back door key was still in her hand. She edged her feet sideways over the rug—in the direction of the dining room, fearful lest a listening presence would detect her intention of flight and leap upon her. Then, stepping with long quick soft steps, she was there, and could see the sheet of paper lying on the table and the writing scribbled upon it. "*I got here late. The clothes didn't dry so I hung them in the kitchen. I left the sitting room window open because the place smelled so close.*"

The key clattered from her fingers. She leaned against the table weakly. Of course! It was Tuesday—Martha's day to clean and wash.

She slammed down the window, locked it, jerked across the curtains. She started towards the hall that led to the bedroom, hesitated, went to the kitchen, opened a drawer and took out the long-bladed carving knife.

First she went into the bathroom that opened from the left of the hall, snapped on the light and with the tip of the knife flipped back the half-drawn curtain. Then to the cloakroom on the right of the hall, then to the bedroom and the dressing room. Lastly she went back to the kitchen, investigated the shadowy retreats behind the drying clothes, the boiler room, the storeroom.

I am getting jumpy, she thought, as she put the knife back into the drawer. It's perfectly insane to behave like this!

After she had folded the cover across the foot of the bed and turned back the sheet, she stood thoughtfully for a moment, then went to the kitchen, got the knife and placed it on the floor at the head of her bed. Although perspiration trickled down her body, she did not open the window.

She awakened screaming—not a loud scream, but a muffled choking cry as from muscles clamped by a hand. She had dreamed the telephone was ringing, that when she answered the receiver had slipped over her shoulder, winding the cord about her throat, tighter and tighter.

The telephone rang.

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She did not switch on the lamp. She did not answer. She lay rigid, her throat arched against the pillows, her eyes fixed on the gleaming, black object.

It continued to ring, loud and insistent, clamouring for attention. Brrr-ing. Brrr-ing. Pause. Brrr-ing. Brrr-ing. Pause.

Still she did not answer. And it stopped.

The idea crept into her mind, only the flicker of an idea at first, then looming to terrifying significance. She should have answered. Perhaps he would think she was not there and would steal across the town in the night to secrete himself in her home for the time when she would be there. The room was so ominously quiet. Without stirring she glanced at the illuminated dial of the clock. The hands pointed to ten minutes to three.

At exactly three the ringing began again.

*I know you are there. Waiting. I know you are there. Waiting.*

She did not raise her body, only her arm, brought the receiver to her pillow and felt its weight slick and cold against her cheek.

Silence. Then the faint tapping of a fingernail against metal. Then the heavy breathing.

*You are afraid to answer and afraid not to answer, aren't you? Listen. I know where you are and that you are alone. Listen. Can't you hear me thinking what I plan to do?*

She could believe she heard the words instead of thought them. They pierced through the rolling fog of her senses, burrowed into her brain and peered out, real as if they had been whispered into the telephone.

Fascinated, she lay still, straining to hear, unable to break away. She could feel the thumping of the pulse in the hollow of her throat.

There was the sound of a match striking. A quietness. The lusty out-blowing of smoke. She could smell the smoke almost, could visualize *The Breather*, hunched on his elbows, leaning towards the telephone, could imagine what his eyes looked like, narrowed, calculating, glinting in the dark of his room.

With cunning stealth, as if he might be spying on her every movement, she pushed the receiver across the pillow, eased it into place and broke the connection. She jabbed her finger in nought and whirled the dial.

"Number, please," the operator said.

"This is Linda Billings of Pine Ridge, Sheppersleigh—under Howard Billings' name in the book—Xavier 7787! I want a call traced."

The crisp curled diction of the operator was placidly aloof. "I am sorry, madam. We do not trace calls."

"Listen. This is important—serious! This man—I don't

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know who he is—he phones every night, four, three, any ungodly hour. And he doesn't answer—just breathes into the telephone! He's dangerous I tell you! I know he's dangerous! I *demand* to have this call traced."

"I am sorry, Madam. I cannot help you. I suggest you contact the business office in the morning. Perhaps they can be of assistance."

Furious, Linda slammed down the receiver.

In the morning she called the business office of the telephone company and after being shunted to three different extensions, talked with a person who sounded authoritative. No, he was very sorry, they did not trace calls. But after her indignant outburst, after she had related the particulars, he seemed concerned. "No, I don't like the sound of it either," he said slowly. "Perhaps we can trace the call for you if you can have someone notify us while the party is still on the line."

He took her name, her number, her address, the hour at which the call would most likely be made.

"Sometime between two thirty and four," she said. "Always between two thirty and four."

That night after work she went straight across to her nearest neighbours, the Hansens. She wished she had taken time to make overtures of friendliness during the two years and a half she had lived so close. But Howard had never liked Mr. Hansen.

Mrs. Hansen, her blue eyes brilliant in a round face pinked from cake baking, responded with lively interest.

"My goodness," she said. "I never heard of such a thing. It makes me crawl just to hear you tell it." She drew Linda into the kitchen and made her sit down while she took out the last batch of baking.

"Of course we'll let you come over and ring the phone company. Now, take this flapjack—it's just out of the oven. I'll set my alarm for two thirty and keep an ear open for the back door."

She rinsed her hands under the tap, surveyed Linda curiously over a plump shoulder. "Now, I don't mean to be snoopy—but do you suppose it could be Mr. Billings—wanting to hear your voice perhaps and not wanting you to know who he was? Men are funny, you know."

"No," Linda said quickly, coolly. "It couldn't be Mr. Billings. He wouldn't do a thing like that."

On her way home, walking across the lawn, she thought: The whole lane will know of it before morning. They'll think I've been playing around, that I have all sorts of men on a string.

At eight thirty she attempted to divert her mind by employing her hands. She decided to take down the hem of her green skirt.

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While snipping the threads she thought of Howard, and wondered how he would handle the situation if he were there with her.

I'll phone him and tell him about it, she decided on impulse. I should have done it before. And at once the decision made her feel safe and protected, a woman not alone. She was glad they had parted friends. It would be easy. She could hear the reassurance of his deep slow voice. " Don't worry, Linda. I'll get to the bottom of this thing right away."

In the bedroom, with her hand curved to pick up the receiver, she stopped cold, staring down at the sleek black instrument that had become something sly and sinister. Perhaps it was the memory of Mrs. Hansen's remark, it may have been any one of a thousand surreptitious reminders that pried the thought loose in her mind, but she stopped, cold.

*It was always the one you least suspected. Always.*

Was it natural that Howard should have agreed to divorce so quietly, without anger, without argument ?

The way he had watched her the Sunday afternoon she had told him she wanted to be free. His head against the back of the chair, eyes half-closed, as if he were weighing something, considering, planning.

She returned to the sitting room, made sure the windows were securely locked, turned on the radio, turned it off again, afraid the blare of the dance band might keep her from hearing some tell-tale noise.

It was after nine—she had finished the hem of her green skirt and was starting to strengthen the fastenings—when she heard footsteps on the front porch. The door chimes pealed softly.

Through the round glass window in the door, in the flood of porch light, she saw the tall figure waiting. It was Howard.

Open the door, Linda, she said. You were going to phone him. Open the door.

" Hello, Linda." He was looking at her strangely, unsmiling. " I've dropped in for something I forgot to take with me. Thought I'd better wait until after dark so that the neighbours wouldn't start speculating."

" Of course, Howard." Her voice thickened.

He stood in the hall, his hat in his hand. " My box of fishing tackle. Is it still on the shelf in the storeroom ? "

He had never gone fishing since she had known him. The tackle, and a rod, had been her last Christmas present to him—something of an experiment.

" Yes, it's there." She glanced quickly to see whether she had left the door ajar.

He walked through the sitting room, the dining room, and the

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kitchen. She listened while he turned the key in the storeroom door, listened to him move about. He was coming through again.

He set down the box on the sitting room rug, straightened. He had put on his hat again and pushed it to the back of his head. His dark eyes moved about. " Mind if I sit down a minute ? "

" Of course not."

She could not very well remain standing. She took the chair nearest the door.

He removed his hat, leaned forward contemplating the pattern in the rug.

" How are you getting on ? "

" All right."

" Job going well at the agency ? "

" Fine."

He stopped swinging his hat, perched it on his knee. One restless hand rubbed back and forth across the surface of the table, strayed to toy with the scissors that lay there on top of the folded green skirt. He picked them up, pressing his thumb experimentally against the closed points. His eyes roved to the curtains. " Awfully hot. Don't you keep the windows open ? "

" No. Ruth's coming over very soon." The instant the words tumbled out she realized they did not hang together.

His eyes, questioning, penetrating, alerting oddly, met hers. " Something wrong, Linda ? " he asked quietly.

" No. Nothing's wrong."

He continued to watch her closely, to press his thumb against the scissors.

" Linda—" The expression in his eyes changed suddenly and although he did not leave the chair, the movement of his body brought him closer.

She sprang to her feet, one hand raised palm out and started to back away.

He flushed, stood up. " I suppose I'd better be going," he said. He jammed on his hat, lifted the box of fishing tackle and avoided looking her way as he walked past.

He was gone. And her eyes were fixed on the scissors as she listened to the slam of the car door.

Brrr-ing. Brrr-ing. Pause. Brrr-ing. Brrr-ing. Pause.

At twenty five minutes past three she was running across the grass to the Hansens', pounding on the back door.

" He's on the line ! " breathlessly she informed Mrs. Hansen, who opened the door almost immediately. " Let me get to the telephone—quick ! "

" Is it her, dear ? " Mr. Hansen called out. He appeared in the

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sitting room, stuffing his nightshirt into his trousers. The two of them hovered over her as she spun the dial.

How wonderful to hear the words, "Yes, Mrs. Billings. The call will be traced."

"Now, I'll tell you what I think it—" She was dimly conscious of the bristle of whiskers as Mr. Hansen rubbed his cheek.

"I can't stay. I've got to keep him on the line." And she was out of the back door again.

One of her bedroom slippers flew off as she raced across the lawn.

Out of breath, she locked the door and tiptoed into the bedroom. The receiver was lying on the pillow where she had left it. She put it to her ear and heard nothing. She placed her hand over the mouthpiece to block out the sound of her hurried breathing, and when it was regular again, coughed softly.

And he coughed.

"You must need very little sleep," she said, "to stay up every night making telephone calls.

"Perhaps it's that you need a job and know if I'm kept awake many more nights you can go after mine." She was reckless in the knowledge that the call was being traced.

After fifteen minutes of listening to intermittent silences and sighs, she said brightly, "I do hope you phone again sometime," and hung up. But she was trembling so violently it took considerable time to unknot the belt of her dressing gown.

She would wait fifteen minutes—no ten.

Eight minutes passed and she dialled.

"Who was it?" she blurted out—"Linda Billings—the call you traced! Who was it?"

"I am sorry, madam," So calm! So infernally calm! "It will be necessary that you contact the business office in the morning for the report."

"In the morning!" She wanted to shout, to beat her fists against the stubborn telephone, to twist it into submission. "I suppose it will be very easy for me to ring in the morning—if I've been strangled."

"I am very sorry, madam. I cannot help you further."

She crashed the receiver down, glared at the telephone. "You devil!" she ground out between clenched teeth. "You black, black devil!"

She sat on the edge of the bed, crying, without tears, rocking from side to side, wringing her hands.

The half hour passed, and the hour. Exhausted from turbulence of emotion, she collapsed in a heap on the bed, her head in her arms like a worn-out child. And she slept.

When she awakened the sun was bright and hot in the world

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outside the drawn curtains. " Good lord," she cried in amazement. " I've forgotten to go to work."

She started towards the bathroom, ran back into the bedroom, to the telephone. After what seemed interminable delay, the telephone company told her what she wanted to know: " The call was traced to the *Blakeshire Hotel*, room 337, occupied by a man called Shaefer."

" But that name means nothing. I've never heard of an R. C. Shaefer."

" That is the report, Mrs. Billings. If you wish further assistance, we suggest you contact the proper authorities."

" Thank you," she said, bewildered. " Thank you very much."

The proper authorities—police.

She called police headquarters. They were most co-operative. Yes, they would look into the calls for her. They would send a man to the *Blakeshire*, to investigate Mr. Shaefer, then would phone her to come up to the hotel and see whether it was someone she knew.

She gave them the agency number.

Later, hurrying into the office, she stopped at Ruth's desk, whispering so Sandy in his corner could not hear. " They're investigating him—the police ! They're going to call me to identify him ! Will you go with me ? "

Ruth leaned on her elbows, tapped a pencil thoughtfully against her teeth. Her grey eyes regarded Linda intently. " Why—of course, I'll go with you."

Every time the telephone rang on the window ledge, she pushed back her chair expectantly. Three rings—that was Sandy's. Two rings—Ruth. One ring !

The wastepaper basket tipped over as she jumped up to answer. It was only one of the clients. " Yes, Mr. Zelling," she said flatly. " We'll have it ready for you today definitely."

And so on through the morning. It was afternoon.

One ring !

" This is Sergeant Manning, Miss Billings. The *Blakeshire Hotel* tells us Mr. Shaefer checked out this morning."

She watched the flag on the bank building ripple and fall.

" You there, Miss Billings ? "

" You mean—you don't know where he is ? "

" No. Transient, most likely. Probably out of the town by now. I don't think you'll have anything more to worry about."

" But I've got to know. I've just got to."

" Umhum." The sergeant sounded sympathetic. " Miss Billings, you'd be surprised how many reports of this nature come to our attention. Usually it's some fool just passing the time away. It

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seldom amounts to anything—If I were you I wouldn't give it another thought. If he phones again, let us know. But I don't think he will."

" Thank you—anyway," she said.

She stood there watching the flag. What was it her grandmother had said when her brother was killed in that crash . . . ? *It wouldn't have made any difference if he had stayed a day longer. If something's going to happen, you can't stop it.* She turned to her desk.

Ruth glanced her way. " Heard your telephone conversation. Checked out, hum ? "

She nodded.

" Well, now you can forget all about it. Prob'ly one of those idiots who pick numbers at random out of the book. Finds the name of a woman and rings her."

Linda said very low, " My number's still listed under Howard Billings."

Ruth's hands tossed the matter aside. " For Pete's sake ! You're making an elephant out of a flea. Wish I had ten shillings for every time a guess-who telephoned me."

Linda said nothing. She wondered why she could not see it as they did—Ruth and the sergeant. Why she was now more terrified than ever, trapped, helpless. This Shaefer. Checked out. Moving closer. Stalking. Sergeant Manning had said, " It *seldom* amounts to anything . . ."

Linda stood up, holding the edge of her desk. " Ruth, you'll have to do the Zelling layout. I don't feel well."

" Gosh, you *do* look sick." Ruth sounded concerned. " Certainly, I'll do it straight away. Run along home."

Her hat, gloves and handbag gathered together, she looked down at Ruth. " Can you come and stay with me tonight ? " she asked.

" Oh, my dear, I really can't. You know how mother's been. Now, don't tell me you're still worrying about these calls ! "

" Perhaps you could come over later ? "

" I can't, Linda. Honestly. Know what I think—that it really hasn't been these calls worrying you. It's delayed shock—reaction from you and Howard splitting up the way you did. If I were you I'd ask for time off and go home to your parents for a while. If you don't take care of yourself you're going to crack up good and proper. Now you go right to bed and sleep round the clock. That's exactly what you need. I'll handle everything all right."

So she left.

Home, on the sofa, she tried to sleep while it was yet light, but she could not close her eyes.

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And after darkness fell about the little house, she began to know terror in a way she had never experienced before. It was not because the rain lashed at the windows. It was not because the old fir thudded on the roof. He was as close as the lilac bushes, standing there, collar turned up, water dripping from the pulled-down brim of his hat, watching, waiting for the lights to go out.

Ironing her blouse on the table in the dining room, she struggled against the thought which kept whispering: *This is the night. It was all leading up to tonight.* And not until she smelled smoke did she realize the iron had burned through her blouse.

She tried cleaning the cupboards. It made too much noise. She tried to read.

At eleven she could leash her terror no longer. She phoned Ruth.

"Please come over. You've got to stay with me tonight."

"But, Linda," Ruth answered in a warm sleepy voice. "I'm all ready for bed—just got out of the bath."

"You've got to come," she said fiercely.

There was a pause, then, "Now listen Linda. I'm not going to leave mother just because you're worried about something that amounts to no more than a hill of beans. If you're so scared why don't you—"

Ruth's voice was cut off. No use ringing her back. She wouldn't come.

Linda went round the bed to the window, pushed aside the curtain and cupping her hands to her eyes peered towards the Hansens'. Their house was dark. She had always been glad there was no house across the lane from hers for in the evenings she had liked to watch the sky redden through the grove of fir trees, but tonight the switching firs suggested violence.

There was a light upstairs in the house down the lane, opposite the Hansens'. But it was a long way off and she did not even know the name of the people who lived there.

She tried to reason with herself: If anyone attempted to break in, he would have to make a noise for the house was locked up tight. She could ring the police and they would be there in no time. Patrol cars were always about.

But would she hear him—with the wind and the rain and the old fir knocking overhead?

The lights dipped, flared up again. She fastened her attention on the chandelier. If the lights went out she would start screaming. But they continued to burn brightly.

She opened the chest of drawers, took up the cardigan of the twin set she was knitting, stationed herself in the sitting room. The metallic click of the needles went faster and faster.

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A gust of wind shook the panes and the lilac scraped against the side of the house. The lights dipped, steadied. It was like a warning.

The needles dropped from her fingers. She had to get out of that house!

I'll go to Ruth's, she thought wildly. Then she remembered. She would have to back the car out of the garage. When she looked into the blackness of the night, the deeper blackness that was the rhododendron bushes seemed wider than it should be, and when the bushes tossed with the wind a section did not toss.

Then came the blessed thought of a taxi. She would phone for a taxi! And the driver would come to the door for her!

The telephone was dead. The storm. The telephone was completely dead.

She moved through the house quietly, with a knowing darting-eyed quietness, got the kitchen knife, slipping it under the knitting in her lap as she sat rigid in the chair by the piano.

From her corner she could see the cloakroom door opposite the bathroom. And her certainty that *The Breather* was near could have been no more a certainty had the closed door slowly pushed open.

Her hands were like hunks of ice, her teeth sunk into her lower lip. And in that frozen, straight-backed position, she watched and waited.

When she heard the sound that was not storm—the sound on the front porch, she did not move, only her hand moved, gripping the handle of the knife under her knitting.

The window! She was out of range of the glass in the front door. He could not see! She could creep to the window, unlock it, jump out and run.

But she would be out there with him, with the dark and the lonely fir trees. He might be hoping for exactly that.

She did not move.

Next day newspaper men wrote on their placards: *BEAUTIFUL GIRL BRUTALLY MURDERED! READ ALL ABOUT IT!*

Returning home from work, the cry like a gong reverberating through her brain, Linda swooped up the paper from the porch and with shaking hand stabbed her key at the lock.

She would never know how she had lived through last night, why her heart had not stopped still from terror. It had not helped to find the broken fir branch on the porch this morning when at the first rays of dawn she had dashed to her car and to the office. She had made up her mind. She would never spend another night in that house! Never!

She would get the clothes she needed and go to an hotel.

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Inside, she dropped to the arm of a chair, ripped open the rolled newspaper. The eyes of the dead girl laughed into hers—a girl photographed with her silver-blonde hair blowing about her face.

"*Estelle Kirkpatrick, well-known model, found murdered this morning in her flat at Royalcrest Lodge. Police searching for man called Shaefer.*"

The rug lifted and fell, like wine-mottled waves. The floor lamp bowed to her.

Shaefer! Phoning girls in the night! She was next on his list!

She rushed to the hall cupboard for her cases.

In the bedroom the telephone rang.

She whirled about, trembling hands out-thrust to push away the sound. The telephone! They'd repaired the line then! It continued to ring with loud urgency.

Only sunlight pouring through the windows could have given her courage to answer.

"Linda!" Ruth's excited voice. "Have you heard the wireless? Have the police phoned you yet?"

"No! What is it!"

"The papers—did you see the papers?"

"Yes—about Shaefer."

"They've caught him, Linda. They've just caught Shaefer!"

"Oh, Ruth!"

"That poor girl. How awful—hiding in her flat and waiting till she was asleep."

"I was to be next, Ruth. He must have phoned her in the same way he did me."

"Linda—no! The wireless explained it all. A friend of Miss Kirkpatrick—the receptionist where she worked—told the police that three years ago Miss K. confided fear for her life. She showed the receptionist a snapshot of herself and a man, taken on the beach; she said if the man ever came up there looking for her to say she'd left town—said she was having her phone number changed and the new one withheld from the telephone book. She was even having her name changed on the bells in the entrance to her block of flats. Then a few days later this man was arrested on a narcotics charge and sentenced to prison. Got out just two weeks ago. Oh, Linda, I feel such a beast, making light of your worry. You knew all along."

"But me—he called *me*."

"Linda, can't you see? Police checked hotels—every place. When they found out about Miss K. having her number changed—about this man she was afraid of—a brushed-off boyfriend, I suppose . . . they put two and two together. The complaint you made about the phone calls. He'd been in prison three years. The wireless said—a young woman reported mysterious night

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phone calls. They caught him in a stolen car a few miles from here."

"But me, Ruth. He did phone *me!*"

"Linda, you poor dear! You are upset. Listen. Three years ago Estelle Kirkpatrick had her phone number changed, but she *didn't move from her flat. She stayed right there.* A little over two years ago you moved into your new house. When the telephone company installed your phone they gave you her *old* number. When Shaefer got out of prison, naturally he remembered his girl friend's *old* number—knew where she lived. When he phoned you he thought he was getting through to Estelle Kirkpatrick."

"Oh—Ruth!"

The receiver fell with a clatter, banged against the table and dangled there. She leaned against the wall, began to cry and to laugh. And she kept nodding at the telephone.

She put the receiver on the hook, clapped her hand to her mouth in an effort to choke back the laughter, slid the hand across her cheek, smearing the tears.

Then she ran round the bed and flung open the window.

In the sitting room her eyes met the eyes of the dead girl, laughing up at her from the floor where the paper lay. With a wordless little cry of compassion she darted for the paper, rolled it tight, twisted it, ran out of the back door and thrust it into the dustbin. Then she raced through the house opening all the windows.

In the sitting room again she parted the billowing curtains and watched the firs rock gently against a softening sky.

And the little house was filled with the fragrance of life, with the green smell of grass washed with rain, and with the perfume of late summer roses.

* * *

## *OFF THE MARK*

Hiram had walked four miles over the hills to call on the girl of his dreams. For a long time they sat silent on a bench by the side of her log-cabin home; but after a while the moon had its effect, and Hiram sidled closer to her and picked up her hand.

"Marthy," he began, "I've got a good clearin' over thar an' a team an' wagon an' some hawgs an' cows an' . . ."

Here he was interrupted by Martha's mother, who had awakened. "Martha!" she called in a loud clear voice. "Is that young man thar yet?"

"No, Ma," came the answer, "but he's gettin' thar."

From *Coronet*

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★*When Denton Welch died in December* 1948 *at the age of thirty, he had already made a name for himself among the younger writers of today. His first novel, Maiden Voyage, which was published in* 1943 *won immediate recognition for the sensitive quality of the writing and the vividness of phrasing and imagery. These same qualities were a feature of his second novel published the next year, and of the volume of short stories, Brave and Cruel, which excited so much comment by their bold experimentalism.*

*Born in Shanghai he spent much of his childhood in China. His early ambition was to become a painter, and when, in his early twenties, he turned from art to literature he brought to his work as a writer many of the qualities of the artist—a quickness of eye, the clearly etched character and design, executed in a few swift strokes, a love of vivid colours and a sure touch when blending the imaginative detail with the whole.*

*Among the letters and unpublished manuscripts found among his papers after his death was an autobiographical fragment relating some of his impressions and experiences as a young art student in London. And this, while it makes no pretensions to plot or the sinews of a short story, illustrates clearly the perceptive quality of his writing and the freshness and vitality which were such a feature of his work.*

# DISCOVERIES

## by DENTON WELCH

WHEN I was an art student, I lived in a room at the top of an eighteenth century house on Croom's Hill. My one small sash-window looked on to Greenwich Park, where lovers lay in the grass, and dogs and children played all day under the great Spanish chestnuts. Little traffic noise came up to me, but there was always the sound of feet on the pavement, so that I had a feeling of holiday, imagining groups of people climbing up to Blackheath to go for long walks, to gather round the huge bonfire on Guy Fawkes' Night, or to swing in the painted boats when the Fair came.

I remember everything about this room, because I was alone in it so much and because I had never before had a place of my own to enjoy.

On each side of the window, the ceiling sloped down to within three or four feet of the wide old floorboards. These had been

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freshly ochred, and on this unpolished, tawny floor lay the pale skin of a lioness. It belonged to the owner of the house, and the comfortable bed was hers too, but nearly everything else had been bought with my weekly pocket-money.

Every afternoon I would go searching in the junk shops of the neighbourhood.

I found my dressing table in an old stable-yard on the other side of the heath. A man kept an open air shop there and walked up and down behind his pile of furniture, like a truculent soldier behind a hastily thrown-up barricade. He let me have the early Victorian work-table for seventeen shillings, and I put it on my shoulder and carried it home there and then, for I was too impatient to wait for it to be delivered.

I scraped the thick dirt off the pedestal with pennies, and rubbed all the surfaces with beeswax and turpentine, until the rich rosewood shone. Over the cradle-like box, which had once been covered with pleated silk, I stuck silver and black striped paper; then I stood the transformed table under a long plain mirror and put my brushes on top and my handkerchiefs and socks in the drawer.

Next to the dressing-table I placed my chest. It was really the bottom half of a Chippendale tallboy, but I covered the rough pine top with a piece of worn Chinese brocade, and pulled off the clumsy wooden knobs which had been fixed on the drawers. As I had no brass handles to match the beautiful key escutcheons, I used to open the drawers by fitting my forefingers into the knob holes.

In one rather dark corner glowed a little Flemish cabinet which I had bought for ten shillings in the New Cross Road. It was seventeenth century ebony and tortoiseshell work. A vermilion ground showed through the translucent parts of the tortoiseshell, and there was a thread of ivory inlay round each black panel. When I found it, the drawers were filled with nuts and bolts, and thick black grease smothered the surface. I think some mechanic must have been using it for years in his workroom.

In this same New Cross shop, kept by an easy-going man and his Irish friend, I also bought an alderman's robe, which I had cleaned and mended so that I could use it as a dressing-gown. It was made of thick crimson damask, lined with violet satin. The hanging sleeves and the hem were heavy with gold braid, and to wear it made me feel old and grand and unreal, so that I would put it on when I wanted to escape from my true self for a little.

My only chair was found, one weekend, in a country shop. It had little outsweeping feet, and a Greek spoon-back, and so I suppose would be called 'Regency'. The back was painted in white and terra cotta with the classic honeysuckle pattern surrounding a gothic cusp and trefoil. The mixture of styles made it strange

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and, to me, very attractive. I found too, when I sat in it that the curved back fitted round my own like a shell.

The bed I covered with my great-grandmother's cashmere shawl. There were huge holes in it, but I ignored these, and saw only the amazing tree pattern which crept over the surface and seemed to gather to it all the lovely colour clashes and harmonies that there are.

Just above the bed, so that I could gaze into it in the morning, hung a little Rajpur hunting scene, which I had found one day by running uninvited up the dark stairs at the back of my favourite shop. I had waited for some time in the showroom, and no one had appeared; so armed with the excuse that I was looking for the owner, I broke into his private apartments.

I found him industriously repainting the clouds in a seascape. He was so good natured that he didn't even show surprise at my sudden intrusion. He let me look at everything, and it was while I was exploring the derelict room next to his own, that I discovered the Indian miniature. Tiny huntsmen on horseback moved between rocks and trees, while their women bathed in a lotus pond. I thought for one moment that it was a shiny reproduction cut out of a magazine and put behind dirty glass in a blistered maplewood frame; but when I took it to the light, I knew that I was wrong.

I think the man let me have it for eight shillings; and on my first free day, I took it to the British Museum, where someone in the Print Room told me that it was of the early eighteenth century.

"It is the sort of thing we would like here," he added, but although his hint delighted me, I pretended not to notice, and took my drawing away, hugging it to me under my arm.

Later I was to make an even more exciting discovery, which should really be a story in itself, but I must just outline it here.

One morning I was hurrying to the art school, when I saw in the old clothes shop at the end of Croom's Hill the glint of a gold background between the rudely gaping trousers and jackets, and the sad polka-dot beach-pyjamas. I was looking at one of the smaller panels of a mediaeval altar-piece, but the sight was too extraordinary to be believed; and as I was already half an hour late, I ran on.

All day the picture haunted me; so after work I went straight back to the shop.

The picture had gone from the window. A moulded glass butter-dish and a jug full of steel hatpins stood there instead. I was afraid that it had been sold and that I would never see it again, but I went into the shop, and after hard work discovered that the picture had been taken upstairs to be kept for a dealer.

Although I had only ten shillings in my pocket, I persuaded the man that I was able to pay the ten pounds he was asking, and he

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at last brought it down and held it out to me reluctantly.

I saw Mary and Joseph and the ox and the ass on each side of a Baby whose little old man's body was prickly with gold rays; and in the thick gold sky swam an angel, bearing a scroll on which I could just read the words '*Gloria in Excelsis*'.

I knew that I must have the picture, and I bargained until the man came down to four pounds; then I stopped, not daring to press him any further. I left the ten shillings and ran back to the house to borrow the rest from my landlady.

When, a few days afterwards, I showed the picture to Professor Constable of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, he told me, that it was Italian work of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, probably from some country place near Siena.

This knowledge enchanted me for weeks. Sitting alone in my room, gazing at the picture, I would try to remember his exact words and the way he looked as he passed judgement.

Then my eyes would wander to all the other things that I had collected. A few, like the picture, were rare and valuable; others, like the rosewood work-table, were quite ordinary, but they all brought something to me, gave me their usefulness, their beauty, or their strangeness.

I would sit there musing, until perhaps Miss S., my landlady, came to ask me down to tea with her father, when I would go into the garden and find them under the fig tree which could never bring its fruit to ripeness, but always dropped it in hard green showers.

We would eat apricot jam on soft bread and butter; and afterwards the father would wander away.

Soon a strange discordant music might come from the house; then I would know that he was playing his harp in the lovely old flagged kitchen.

I had seen him once in his woollen dressing-gown and skull cap, sitting in front of the huge golden instrument, plucking at the wires with his hands, while his eyes seemed fixed on the golden woman's torso at the top. And as he played, he sang a stern hymn in a goaty falsetto; for he was a Plymouth Brother; but not, I believe, any longer of the 'closed' order.

* * *

## *PORTRAIT FROM LIFE*

*One day I went into a friend's flat and I did at last see a caricature of me that seemed to be good. It was cruel, of course, but still it was what a caricature should be. Then it moved and I saw it was a mirror.*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

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# THE LONG PROMENADE

**"Sure," said the Loud Red Patrick, "'twas that last little drop did it for him"**

## by RUTH McKENNEY

THERE were eight brothers Patrick in the Flannigan family, not counting The Old Patrick who was my great grandfather. And the way of it all was this, or so my grandfather told it.

"Never such a wicked man lived as The Old Patrick," he would say. "Harsh of voice like a bull, and bellowing it was, from morning to night. Never did he put his hand to honest work, but always sat in the tenement, waiting for the girls to come home from the paper-flower factory, so he could take away from them the pennies they earned working from dark dawn until the hour of gaslight. Then so soon as he had the pitiful wages they made—only nine was little Maggie when she died of the coughing, and not eleven was Mary, and but fourteen was Kate—The Old Patrick would be off to the saloon, and late in the nights he would return, ugly with drink, bellowing and sobbing, with the tears running down into his long red beard."

"Why did he cry?" I used to ask.

"He wept for ould Ireland," Grandpa would retort. "He did not care for Ohio. And then he was afraid the Flannigans were dying out."

"Then," he would continue, "one afternoon he came home. 'Get me the priest!' says he in a terrible voice. We all ran at once, thinking it was dying he was."

But The Old Patrick was not dying, not by any means. When the priest arrived, panting, ringing his little bell and ready for the last rites, he had a rude shock, finding The Old Patrick sitting on the bed, combing his long red beard, apparently in superb health.

"Flannigans," The Old Patrick bellowed at the priest, "are dying out. Get all the boys. I want them baptized 'Patrick.'"

The priest argued. The Old Patrick was adamant. When all the Flannigans but one had died, and only one last survivor remained, that last lonely Flannigan—The Old Patrick apparently thought of him sadly, like the last Mohican or the last buffalo—must never be cursed with some puling, wretched name, such as "Timothy" or "James" or "John." No. That last Flannigan, The Old Patrick had decided, would be named after him.

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The priest said the Church couldn't baptize a boy twice.

The Old Patrick flexed his biceps and offered to throw the priest out of the window. The priest, who was no coward, said he would excommunicate The Old Patrick on the way from the fifth floor to the cobblestones. The Old Patrick countered with a perfectly fiendish proposal. If the priest wouldn't baptize the seven little Flannigan boys Patrick—the eighth was already called Patrick—The Old Patrick would sell the girls, all three of them, to the Madam round the corner on Cedar Avenue.

The priest swallowed. Surely The Old Patrick would never be after doing anything so wicked? And yet, The Old Patrick had sold everything else in the family . . .

"It isn't legal," the priest complained.

"Baptize them!" The Old Patrick bawled. "'Tis weary I am of this talk."

So the priest baptized seven little Flannigans, including my grandfather, and although when they grew up they discovered the priest had been right and it wasn't legal, still by that time they were used to being called Patrick, all eight brothers—or cousins—and they never bothered to change back to their old names, which indeed some had entirely forgotten.

Most of the eight Patrick Flannigans wore a prefix. "The Utica Patrick" had once, on a boxcar, by mistake, passed through Utica, N.Y. My grandfather was "The Loud Red Patrick." Another great-uncle was "The Drunken Patrick." And my great-grandfather became, on the day he organized the group baptism, "The Old Patrick."

He also became, on that great day, a fireman. It was quite a shock, but a very happy one, to the Flannigans, Patricks and girls alike.

"No sooner was the priest gone," Grandpa would tell us joyously, "than The Old Patrick got up from his bed, and with one last kick at little Maggie—her coughing rasped his nerves, he was always saying—he opened the door. 'I've done all I could do,' he bellowed—the man could never speak small—'but 'tis no use. I'm after joining the fire department.'"

And off he went, never to be seen again, though much was heard.

"Ah, the drink," my grandfather could say. "'Tis a curse on them who cannot stop. A little whisky is a warming thing on a cool day, a glass of beer makes the throat sing in the summer's heat—but that last drop! Ah, children, 't'was that last little drop—the one glass too many undid your poor cousin, The Drunken Patrick."

"Papa," my mother would say at this point, "the children!"

But we had already heard the saga of The Drunken Patrick at

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Syracuse often enough to have it by heart. And Grandpa always told the story with relish.

It all happened the time the family went to Syracuse to see Aunt Katherine die, only she got well. The Drunken Patrick was a very sick man when he turned up at Syracuse to pray at Aunt Katharine's bier. The Drunken Patrick should have stayed at home with a doctor and a nurse, but when he heard Aunt Katherine's will was about to be read, he pulled himself together and made an astonishing recovery.

Pale and wan, he travelled with the rest of the clan down to Syracuse: there was a widespread theory in the Flannigan family that Aunt Katharine was rich. When Aunt Katharine actually died, many years later, the theory was totally exploded, but The Drunken Patrick, who went to Syracuse straight from his sick bed, hoped for the best.

For a few days, while Aunt Katherine hovered between life and death upstairs, The Drunken Patrick stayed sober, but the shock of her recovery unhinged him and he rushed off to a speak-easy—Syracuse was local option at that time of Prohibition—to assuage his sorrows.

"You see, law or no law, saloon or no saloon, The Drunken Patrick took that last little drop too much," Grandpa always pointed out to my sister and me.

"Yes, Grandpa," we used to say politely, "so then what happened?"

Grandpa would sigh and take up the tale. It appeared that after singing a few songs in Aunt Katharine's backyard generally about the owl and the pussy-cat, and reciting *The Ancient Mariner* to prosaic oldsters in the Flannigan clan, The Drunken Patrick finally had a serious relapse. He was, everybody in the family agreed, a sick man, and he ought to be back in Cleveland, not making a scandal in Syracuse.

Flannigans always assigned such difficult jobs to Grandpa because he had a warm heart and couldn't say no.

The Utica Patrick and Grandpa were instructed to take the erring relative home. So The Drunken Patrick, flanked by his two older, staider, second cousins, lurched on to the Pullman car at Syracuse and spent a dismal night in his berth, which he, being an undertaker by profession, confused, of course, with a coffin.

He also thought the conductor, a stiff-necked old man with a white, walrus moustache, was an owl. The conductor was not amused. Grandpa and The Utica Patrick had a difficult trip, soothing the train authorities and persuading The Drunken Patrick he wasn't buried alive.

"Dig me up! Dig me up!" The Drunken Patrick bawled at

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intervals all night long from behind the green Pullman curtains. Travelling salesmen in the Pullman car shuddered at this eerie plea, and the conductor lost his temper.

Finally The Utica Patrick stuck his head in The Drunken Patrick's berth and said coldly, "And would we bury you without your dress suit?"

The Drunken Patrick examined his nightshirt. "Oh, well. Tell that owl to fly in, then. He reminds me of my mother."

The indignation at this blasphemy was general, although, as Grandpa explained it, the conductor did look something like Cousin Lizzie.

The long night finally came to an end, and The Drunken Patrick took a bit of a rest. He awoke deplorably refreshed, albeit thirsty. At Youngstown, Ohio, where the train stopped for an hour, The Drunken Patrick insisted on a breath of fresh air. However, in the railroad bar, where The Drunken Patrick took his constitutional, an altercation developed between an Orangeman, who was proud of it, and the Flannigans.

Grandpa, in after years, blamed himself severely—but he was always hotheaded about Irish freedom, and this impudent snip of an Ulsterman kept crying, "The King, God Save Him!" and, with a flourish, breaking whisky glasses on the floor.

It was more than Grandpa could bear, and even The Utica Patrick, usually calm, cool, and indifferent about anything except money, lost his grip and began to shout, "God Curse the Tyrants! Up the Rebels!"—an old Flannigan battlecry.

In the meantime, while his relatives debated home rule with the enemy, The Drunken Patrick was explaining in detail to the bartender how to embalm a corpse. The bartender kept saying, "No, for God's sake, no, I don't want to hear about it. Hold your tongue, sir!"

"Who are you to tell me to hold my tongue?" The Drunken Patrick asked the bartender. "Do *you* have to be an undertaker? No. You do not. When your mother, or someone else near and dear passes on, as we say in the trade, do *you* have to lay her out? *No!* You pay somebody else to do your embalming for you, *don't you?*"

"Well," the bartender said weakly, "I never quite thought of it that way."

"Oh, of course not. People like you never think what we undertakers go through. So will you *please not interrupt* me? Where were we? We have the corpse on the slab, I believe? Good. Now we take the knife . . ."

"No, for God's sake, *No*," the bartender sobbed, as he poured himself a stiff shot to steady his nerves.

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Two or three hours after the train left, Grandpa noticed that The Drunken Patrick was bothering people again. "Give over all this chat about the embalming," Grandpa hissed, "'tis morbid, Pat. You promised . . . Why don't you sing, lad?"

"*Don't interrupt me!*" The Drunken Patrick cried furiously. "Now I've lost the thread. I'll have to go back a bit. Let's see. We had the corpse on the slab . . ."

"Not all over again," the bartender moaned. "I can't stand it all over again."

The next morning The Drunken Patrick did not feel well at all; in fact he was limp and apparently unconscious. Grandpa feared they'd never allow him on the train, not in that condition. An ambulance was indicated for the last stage of the journey back to Cleveland. But this was 1907, and they could find no ambulances for hire in all of Youngstown.

The Utica Patrick was much annoyed with the whole situation, and after a whole day, during which The Drunken Patrick did not really seem to be getting much better, The Utica Patrick was beside himself. Time was passing. He had to get back to his funeral parlour; business was probably slumping; affairs would go all awry without the captain's hand at the wheel.

The Utica Patrick suddenly had a brilliant idea. "Why not a hearse? We could stretch him out in the back, just like a . . . I mean, there's plenty of room."

Grandpa objected, just at first. "He'll be outraged if he comes to and finds himself riding along in a . . . you know. It's enough to startle a man, it is indeed, Pat."

"Necessity," The Utica Patrick announced firmly, "is the mother of makeshift. He won't mind; he's in the trade himself."

Grandpa shuddered delicately, but The Drunken Patrick was very sick and The Utica Patrick in a very great hurry to get home. The following day, The Utica Patrick borrowed a rather old-fashioned hearse from a comrade undertaker in Youngstown, and rented two horses from a livery stable.

The Drunken Patrick was tucked up comfortably in the back of the hearse. Grandpa and The Utica Patrick, dodging black plumes, climbed to the driver's box and whipped up the hired steeds. Thus, with something of a flourish, the Flannigans departed for Cleveland.

On the open road, the day grew warm. The sun shone brightly and the birds sang. Inside the hearse, The Drunken Patrick revived slightly; he sat up, looked around, and shrieked. Grandpa got down from the driver's seat, explained about the dearth of

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ambulances in Youngstown and asked The Drunken Patrick how he felt.

" All right," The Drunken Patrick said, a little sullenly, " but it's stuffy in here. No ventilation."

Grandpa stuck his head in the hearse. The Drunken Patrick was correct, the hearse was fetid. After consulting with The Utica Patrick, Grandpa found a harness strap and tied back the hearse doors, so that The Drunken Patrick could look out on the smiling August countryside. The Utica Patrick said, " Giddyap ! " and the horses plunged smartly ahead.

Still The Drunken Patrick was not satisfied. He claimed he was getting terribly lurched about in the back of the hearse ; twice he fell off the improvised bed, and once he almost rolled out of the hearse altogether. The Utica Patrick was exasperated at all these time-consuming halts, but Grandpa, a warm hearted man, finally rigged up a sort of rope harness to fasten The Drunken Patrick to his stretcher.

Everything was now at last in order. The Utica Patrick whipped up the horses, and the hearse sped along in the warm sunshine, up hill and down dale, until Grandpa saw two farmers walking along the road.

The farmers took off their hats respectfully as the hearse went by ; and The Drunken Patrick, without thinking, waved amiably from his bed in the rear.

" *He's alive !* " one of the farmers bawled. " *Stop !* "

Grandpa and The Utica Patrick were baffled, just at first. They pulled up the horses and waited for the panting, terrified rustics to overtake them.

" The corpse . . ." one of the hayseeds yelled. " It waved ! "

Grandpa and The Utica Patrick and The Drunken Patrick laughed very heartily. Grandpa, choking, convulsed, explained about The Drunken Patrick only being sick, not dead, and the hearse being borrowed in lieu of an ambulance, and so on.

" Oh," the farmers said.

The three Flannigans were much amused by the mistake. They thought it a rich, splendid jest. Flannigans were ever city folk, with a poor opinion of the gullible peasantry, and, as Grandpa said, The Drunken Patrick, when in good spirits, was always the lad for a joke. When the hearse overtook the next farmer, The Drunken Patrick did not content himself with waving. " Help ! " he cried cheerfully. " They're burying me alive ! "

" My God ! " the farmer bawled. " The corpse ! It talks ! "

Grandpa and The Utica Patrick said, " Really ? "

" But he's . . ." The farmer swallowed. " He's not dead."

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" Oh, that ? " Grandpa said carelessly. " I know. I said as much this morning."

The Utica Patrick shrugged. " Probably he'll be dead by the time we get to the graveyard. If not . . . well . . ." Grandpa shrugged too.

The terrified farmer backed away, his eyes bulging. " In cold blood," he muttered.

The Utica Patrick explained this time.

" Oh," the farmer said, trying to rearrange his ideas.

" You look like an owl," the corpse said from the back of the hearse. " But then, so did my mother. Oh, well ! "

The farmer went away, furious.

The next victim was the sheriff of Canton County. He galloped after the speeding hearse on an old, winded nag, crying dramatically, " *Stop ! He lives ! He lives !* "

The Drunken Patrick encouraged the sheriff with many plaintive cries for assistance, and his performance was so pathetic and so persuasive that Grandpa had quite a difficult time explaining the joke afterwards. In fact, the sheriff was downright sullen about the whole episode until The Utica Patrick pulled up the horses, parked the hearse by the nearest saloon, and stood the outraged officer of the law several beers in quick succession.

" Haw, haw, haw," the sheriff finally said, after the fourth beer, " 'at's a good one ! Haw ! "

The Drunken Patrick was a big success in Massillon, Ohio, not to mention Akron. By this time he was feeling so much better that he was sitting up on his bed, waving at all the passers-by, bawling, " Look, tied hand and foot ! " A lady in Akron fainted.

Grandpa and The Utica Patrick and The Drunken Patrick laughed almost all the way to Cleveland. In the ordinary way of things, Grandpa did not like practical jokes, but this was a little different. The farmers looked so staggered ! The various sheriffs along the way were so terribly indignant, until the corpse finally broke down and told them the truth !

But even the best joke can wear thin. As dusk fell, The Drunken Patrick grew tired of waving at people, and Grandpa and The Utica Patrick, anxious only to end their journey, paid no more attention to the alarmed citizenry.

" And so at last, children," Grandpa would tell my sister and me, " we came into Cleveland. The horses were winded, and I was tired indeed. We drew up in front of the boarding house where The Drunken Patrick lived. The Utica Patrick and I got down from the box to help our invalid up to his room.

" It was dark now, and we put our heads in the back of the hearse,

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and I called out, 'Pat! Oh, Pat! It's home we are, now . . .' But, of course, as you have long since guessed, children, he was dead."

"Dead?" I said blankly, the first time I heard this story.

"Yes," Grandpa said sadly. "Of the drink."

Then he sighed, and took a deep breath. "It is as I was telling you, my dears. 'Twas that last little drop that undid him. When it comes to whisky, temperance is my motto."

* * *

## *CASTLE IN THE AIR*

**Or a hole in the ground—home, they say, is where the heart is. Here are some famous dwelling places. Have you the key of the door? Count one point for recognizing the dwelling, one for the source and one for the author, making thirty points in all. The answers are on page 71.**

1. *It seemed that some forgetful person had left a doorscraper lying about—but a second look showed a solid little door there too, with a bellpull and a nameplate.*
2. *"Before the starry threshold of Jove's court . . . above the smoke and stir of this dim spot Which men call Earth," this spirit claimed his dwelling.*
3. *Often she dreamed of this great tragic house, now forlorn and deserted and gutted by fire—though close by in Happy Valley the lilac bloomed and the surf thundered on the beach.*
4. *An Elysium for poets this, where mine host's Canary wine and venison pies would vie with the nectar and ambrosia of the gods.*
5. *The kitchen appeared to be the nursery in this strange ducal household, and since the cook was as mad as her mistress, no wonder the baby was a changeling.*
6. *"Cold winds woke the gray-eyed morn About the lonely moated grange," while its occupant mourned unceasingly the lover who did not come.*
7. *It was a neat little cottage, with cheerful bow windows and a garden full of flowers—in which stood its owner, a strange old woman, brandishing a knife, perhaps to scare the donkeys or wandering boys.*
8. *"Twice five miles of fertile ground With walls and towers were girdled round" to make this fabulous home for this fabulous monarch.*
9. *Out of the night of storm she came to her lover's arms—and to unsuspected death by a snaky coil.*
10. *More lively than humorous were their bedfellows, we imagine, on this sojourn high in the Pyrenees—and surely unforgettable?*

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# ESCAPE

**"They'll never follow us," he had promised, "not back through two hundred years"**

## by RAY BRADBURY

THE fireworks sizzled across the cool-tiled square, banged against adobe café walls, then rushed on hot wires to bash the high church tower, while a fiery bull ran about the plaza chasing boys and laughing men. It was a spring night in Mexico in the year 1938.

Mr. and Mrs. William Travis stood on the edge of the yelling crowd, smiling. The bull charged. Ducking, the man and wife ran, fire pelting them, past the brass band that pulsed out vast rhythms of *La Paloma*. The bull passed, a framework of bamboo and gunpowder, carried lightly on the shoulders of a charging Mexican.

"I've never enjoyed myself so much in my life," gasped Susan Travis, stopping.

"It's terrific," said William.

"It will go on, won't it? I mean our trip?"

He patted his breast pocket. "I've enough traveller's cheques for a lifetime. Enjoy yourself. Forget it. They'll never find us."

"Never?"

Now someone was hurling giant fireworks from the bell tower.

The bull was dead. The Mexican lifted its framework from his shoulders. Children clustered to touch the magnificent papier mâché animal.

"Let's examine the bull," said William.

As they walked past the café entrance, Susan saw the strange man looking at them, a white man in a white suit, with a thin, sunburned face. His eyes watched them coldly as they walked.

She would never have noticed him if it had not been for the bottles at his immaculate elbow; a fat bottle of *crème de menthe*, a clear bottle of vermouth, a flagon of cognac, and seven other bottles of assorted liqueurs, and, at his fingertips, ten small half-filled glasses from which, without taking his eyes off the street, he sipped, occasionally squinting, pressing his thin mouth shut upon the savour. In his free hand a thin Havana cigar smoked, and on a chair stood twenty packets of Turkish cigarettes, six boxes of cigars and some bottles of eau de cologne.

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" Bill—" whispered Susan.

" Don't worry," William said. " That man's nobody."

" I saw him in the plaza this morning."

" Don't look back, keep walking, examine the papier mâché bull—here, that's it, ask questions."

" Do you think he's from the Searchers ? "

" They *couldn't* follow us ! "

" They might ! "

" What a nice bull," said William to the man who owned it.

" He couldn't have followed us back through two hundred years, could he ? "

" Watch yourself ! " said William.

She swayed. He crushed her elbow tightly, steering her away.

" Don't faint." He smiled, to make it look good. " You'll be all right. We'll go into that café, and drink in front of him, so if he *is* what we think he is, he won't suspect anything."

" No, I couldn't."

" We've *got* to—come on, now. And so I said to David, that's *ridiculous !* " He spoke this last in a loud voice as they went up the café steps.

We are here, thought Susan. Who are we ? Where are we going ? What do we fear ? Start at the beginning, she told herself, holding to her sanity, as she felt the adobe floor underfoot.

My name is Ann Kristen, my husband's name is Roger, we were living in the year 2155 A.D., in a world that was evil. A world that was like a great ship pulling away from the shore of sanity and civilization, roaring its black horn in the night, taking two billion people with it, whether they wanted to go or not, to death, to fall over the edge of the earth and the sea into radio-active flame and madness.

They walked into the café. The man was staring at them. A phone rang.

The phone startled Susan. She remembered one ringing two hundred years in the future, on that blue April morning in 2155, and herself answering it :

" Ann, this is Renée ! Have you heard ? I mean about *Travel In Time, Limited* ? Trips to Rome in 21 B.C., trips to Napoleon's Waterloo ; any time, anywhere ! "

" Renée, you're joking."

" No. Clinton left this morning for Philadelphia in 1776. *Travel In Time, Ltd.*, arranges everything. Costs money. But *think*, to actually *see* the burning of Rome, to see Kubla Khan, Moses and the Red Sea ! You've probably got a circular in your post now."

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She had opened the suction mail-tube and there was the metal foil advertisement:

*ROME AND THE BORGIAS!*

*THE WRIGHT BROTHERS AT KITTY HAWK!*

*TRAVEL IN TIME, LTD., can costume you, put you in a crowd during the assassination of Lincoln or Cæsar! We guarantee to teach you any language you need to move freely in any civilization, in any year, without friction. Latin, Greek, ancient English colloquial. Take your holiday in TIME as well as Place!*

Renée's voice was buzzing on the phone. "Tom and I leave for 1492 tomorrow. They're arranging for Tom to sail with Columbus—isn't it amazing?"

"Yes," murmured Ann, stunned. "What does the government say about this Time Machine Company?"

"Oh, the police have an eye on it. Afraid people might evade taxation, run off and hide in the Past. Everyone has to leave a security bond behind, his house and belongings, to guarantee return. After all, the war's on."

"Yes, the war," murmured Ann. "The war."

Standing there, holding the phone, she had thought: Here is the chance my husband and I have talked and prayed about for so many years. We don't like this world of 2155. We want to run away from his work at the bomb factory—from my job with disease-culture units. Perhaps there is some chance for us, to escape, to run for centuries into a wild country of years where they will never find us and bring us back to burn our books, censor our thoughts, scald our minds with fear, march us, scream at us with radios . . .

The phone rang.

They were in Mexico in the year 1938.

She looked at the stained café wall.

Good workers for the Future State were allowed holidays into the Past to escape fatigue. And so she and her husband had moved back into 1938. They took a room in London, enjoyed the theatres, and walking in the parks and by the Thames to the Houses of Paliament. And on the third day, they had changed their clothes and their names, and flown off to hide in Mexico.

"It *must* be him," whispered Susan, looking at the stranger seated at the table. "Those cigarettes, the cigars, the liqueurs. They give him away. Remember *our* first night in the Past?"

A month ago, on their first night in London, before their flight, they had tasted all the strange drinks, bought odd foods, perfumes, and cigarettes of ten dozen rare brands, for they were scarce in the Future, where war was everything. So they had made fools of them-

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selves, rushing in and out of shops, restaurants, tobacconists, and going up to their room to get wonderfully ill.

And now here was this stranger, doing likewise, doing a thing that only a man from the Future would do, who had been starved of drink and cigarettes for too many years.

Susan and William sat down and ordered a drink.

The stranger was examining their clothes, their hair, her jewellery, the way they walked and sat.

" Sit easily," said William under his breath. " Look as if you've worn this style of clothing all your life."

" We should never have tried to escape."

" Good heavens," said William. " He's coming over. Let me do the talking."

The stranger bowed before them. There was the faintest tap of heels knocking together. Susan stiffened. That military sound—unmistakable as that certain ugly rap on your door at midnight.

" Mr. Kristen," said the stranger, " you did not pull up your trouser legs when you sat down."

William froze. He looked at his hands lying on either leg, innocently. Susan's heart was beating swiftly.

" You've got the wrong person," said William, quickly. " My name's not Krisler."

" Kris*ten*," corrected the stranger.

" I'm William Travis," said William. " And I don't see what my trouser legs have to do with you."

" Sorry." The stranger pulled up a chair. " Let us say I thought I knew you because you did *not* pull your trousers up. Everyone does. If they don't the trousers bag quickly. I am a long way from home, Mr.—Travis—and in need of company. My name is Simms."

" Mr. Simms, we appreciate your loneliness, but we're tired. We're leaving for Acapulco tomorrow."

" A charming spot. I was just there, looking for some friends of mine. They are somewhere. I shall find them yet. Oh, is the lady a bit sick ? "

" Good night, Mr. Simms."

They started out of the door. William holding Susan's arm firmly.

They did not look back when Mr. Simms called, " Oh, just one other thing." He paused and then slowly spoke the words :

" Twenty-one fifty-five A.D."

Susan shut her eyes and felt the earth falter under her. She kept walking into the fiery plaza, seeing nothing . . .

They locked the door of their hotel room. Then she was crying and they were standing in the dark, and the room tilted under them.

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Far away, fireworks exploded, there was laughter in the plaza.

" What a damned, loud nerve," said William. " Him sitting there, looking us up and down like animals, smoking his damn cigarettes, drinking his drinks. I should have killed him then ! " His voice was nearly hysterical. " He even had the nerve to use his real name to us. The Chief of the Searchers. And the thing about my trouser legs. I should have pulled them up when I sat down. It's an automatic gesture of this day and age. When I didn't do it, it set me off from the others. It made *him* think : Here's a man who has never worn trousers, a man used to breech-uniforms and future styles. I could kill myself for giving us away ! "

" No, no, it was my walk, these high heels, that did it. Our hair-cuts, so new, so fresh. Everything about us is odd and uneasy."

William turned on the light. " He's still testing us. He's not positive about us, not completely. We can't run away from him, then. We can't make him certain. We'll go to Acapulco, leisurely."

" Perhaps he *is* sure of us, but is just playing."

" I wouldn't put it past him. He's got all the time in the world. He can dally here if he wants, and bring us back to the Future sixty seconds after we left it. He might keep us wondering for days, laughing at us."

Susan sat on the bed, wiping the tears from her face, smelling the old smell of charcoal and incense.

" They won't make a scene, will they ? "

" They won't dare. They'll have to get us alone to put us in the Time Machine and send us back."

" There's a solution then," she said. " We must never be alone, but always with a crowd."

Footsteps sounded outside their locked door.

They turned out the light and undressed in silence. The footsteps went away.

Susan stood by the window looking down at the plaza in the darkness. " So that building there is a church ? "

" Yes."

" I've often wondered what a church looked like. It's been so long since anyone saw one. Can we visit it tomorrow ? "

" Of course. Come to bed."

They lay in the dark room.

Half an hour later, their phone rang. She lifted the receiver.

" Hello ? "

" The rabbits may hide in the forest," said a voice, " but a fox can always find them."

She replaced the receiver and lay back straight and cold in the bed.

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Outside, in the year 1938, a man played three tunes upon a guitar, one after another . . .

During the night, she put her hand out and almost touched the year 2155. She felt her fingers slide over cool spaces of time, as over a corrugated surface, and she heard the insistent thump of marching feet, a million bands playing a million military tunes. She saw the fifty thousand rows of disease-culture in their aseptic glass tubes, her hand reaching out to them at her work in that huge factory in the future.

She saw the tubes of leprosy, bubonic, typhoid, tuberculosis. She heard the great explosion and saw her hand burned to a wrinkled plum, felt it recoil from a concussion so immense that the world was lifted and let fall, and all the buildings broke and people bled and lay silent. Great volcanoes, machines, winds, avalanches slid down to silence and she awoke sobbing, in bed, in Mexico, many years away . . .

In the early morning, drugged with the single hour's sleep they had finally been able to obtain, they awoke to the sound of heavy traffic in the street.

Susan peered down from the iron balcony at a small crowd of eight people only now emerging, chattering, yelling, from lorries and cars with red lettering on them. A crowd of Mexicans had followed the trucks.

"*Qué pasa?*" Susan called to a little boy.

The boy replied.

Susan turned back to her husband. "A Hollywood film company, here on location."

"Sounds interesting." William was in the shower. "Let's watch them. I don't think we'd better leave today. We'll try to lull Simms."

For a moment, in the bright sun, she had forgotten that somewhere in the hotel, waiting, was a man smoking a thousand cigarettes, it seemed. She saw the eight noisy, happy Americans below and wanted to call to them: "Save me, hide me, help me! I'm from the year 2155!"

But the words stayed in her throat. The functionaries of *Travel In Time Ltd.* were not foolish. In your brain, before you left on your trip, they placed a psychological block. You could tell no one your true time or birthplace, nor could you reveal any of the future to those in the past.

The past and the future must be protected from each other. Only with this hindrance were people allowed to travel unguarded through the ages. The future must be protected from any change brought about by her people travelling in the past. Even if Susan

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wanted to with all her heart, she could not tell any of those happy people below in the plaza who she was, or what her predicament had become.

" What about breakfast ? " said William.

Breakfast was being served in the immense dining room. Ham and eggs for everyone. The place was full of tourists. The film people entered, all eight of them, six men and two women, giggling and moving chairs about.

And Susan sat near them feeling the warmth and protection they offered, even when Mr. Simms came down the stairs, smoking his Turkish cigarette with great intensity. He nodded at them from a distance, and Susan nodded back, smiling, because he couldn't do anything to them here, in front of eight film people and twenty other tourists.

" Those actors," said William. " Perhaps I could hire two of them, say it was a joke, dress them in our clothes, and get them to drive off in our car, when Simms is in such a spot where he can't see their faces. If two people pretending to be us could lure him off for a few hours, we might be able to reach Mexico City. It'd take years to find us there ! "

" Hey ! "

A fat man, smelling of whisky, leaned on their table.

" English tourists ! " he cried. " I'm so sick of seeing Mexicans, I could kiss you ! " He shook their hands. " Come on, eat with us. Misery loves company. I'm Misery, this is Miss Gloom, and Mr. and Mrs. Do-We-Hate-Mexico ! We all hate it. But we're here for some preliminary shots for a damn film. The rest of the cast arrives tomorrow. My name's Joe Melton, I'm a director, and if this isn't the gloomiest country—funerals in the streets, people dying—come on, move over, join the party, cheer us up ! "

Susan and William were both laughing.

" Am I funny ? " Mr. Melton asked the immediate world.

" Wonderful ! " Susan moved over.

Mr. Simms was glaring across the dining room at them.

She made a face at him.

Mr. Simms advanced among the tables.

" Mr. and Mrs. Travis ! " he called. " I thought we were breakfasting together, alone ? "

" Sorry," said William.

" Sit down, sir," said Mr. Melton. " Any friend if theirs is a friend of mine."

Mr. Simms sat. The film people talked loudly and while they talked, Mr. Simms said, quietly, " I hope you slept well."

" Did you ? "

" I'm not used to spring mattresses," replied Mr. Simms,

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wryly. " But there are compensations. I stayed up half the night trying out new cigarettes and foods. Odd, even fascinating. A whole new spectrum of sensation, these ancient vices."

" We don't know what you're talking about," said Susan.

Simms laughed. " Always play acting. It's no use. Nor is this stratagem of crowds. I'll get you alone soon enough. I'm immensely patient."

" Say," Mr. Melton broke in, " is this fellow giving you any trouble ? "

" It's all right."

" Say the word and I'll get rid of him."

Melton turned back to call his associates. In the laughter, Mr. Simms went on : " Let us come to the point. It took me a month of tracing you through towns and cities to find you, and all of yesterday to be certain about you. If you come with me quietly, I might be able to get you off with no punishment—if you agree to go back to work on the Hydrogen-Plus bomb."

" We don't know what you're talking about."

" Stop it ! " cried Simms, irritably. " Use your intelligence ! You know we can't let you get away with this escape. Other people in the year 2155 might get the same idea and do the same. We need people."

" To fight your wars," said William.

" Bill ! "

" It's all right, Susan. We'll talk on his terms now. We can't escape."

" Excellent," said Simms. " Really, you've both been incredibly romantic, running away from your responsibilities."

" Running away from horror."

" Nonsense. Only a war."

" What are you people talking about," asked Mr. Melton.

Susan wanted to tell him. But you could only speak in generalities such as Simms and William were now discussing.

" Only *the* war," said William. " Half the world dead with leprosy bombs ! "

" Nevertheless," Simms pointed out, " the inhabitants of the Future resent you two living on a tropical isle, as it were, while they drop off the cliff into hell. Death loves death, not life. Dying people love to know that others die with them ; it is a comfort to learn you are not alone in the kiln, in the grave. I am the guardian of their collective resentment against you two."

" Look at the guardian of resentments ! " said Mr. Melton to his companions.

" The longer you keep me waiting, the harder it will be for you. We need you on the bomb project, Mr. Kristen. Return now—no

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torture. Later, we'll force you to work, and after you've finished the bomb we'll test out a number of complicated new devices on you, sir."

"I've got a proposition," said William. "I'll come back with you, if my wife stays here alive and safe, away from the war."

Mr. Simms debated. "All right. Meet me in the plaza in ten minutes. Pick me up in your car. Drive me to a deserted country spot. I'll have the Travel Machine pick us up there."

"Bill!" Susan held his arm tightly.

"Don't argue." He looked squarely at her. "It's settled." To Simms: "One thing. Last night, you could have got in our room and kidnapped us. Why didn't you?"

"Shall we say that I was enjoying myself?" replied Mr. Simms languidly, sucking his new cigar. "I hate giving up this wonderful atmosphere, this sun, this holiday, I regret leaving behind the wine and the cigarettes. Oh, how I regret it. The plaza then, in ten minutes. Your wife will be protected and may stay here as long as she wishes. Say your goodbyes."

Mr. Simms rose and walked out.

"There goes Mr. Big-Talk!" yelled Mr. Melton at the departing gentleman. He turned and looked at Susan. "Hey. Someone's crying. Breakfast's no time for people to cry, now *is* it?"

At nine fifteen, Susan stood on the balcony of their room, gazing down at the plaza. Mr. Simms was seated there, his neat legs crossed, on a delicate bronze bench. Biting the tip from the cigar, he lighted it tenderly.

Susan heard the throb of an engine, and far up the street, out of a garage and slowly down the cobbled hill came William in his car.

The car picked up speed. Thirty, now forty, now fifty miles an hour. Chickens scattered before it.

Mr. Simms took off his white Panama hat and mopped his pink forehead, put his hat back on, and then saw the car.

It was rushing sixty miles an hour, straight for the plaza.

"William!" screamed Susan.

The car hit the low plaza curb, thundering, jumped up, sped across the pavement towards the green bench where Mr. Simms now dropped his cigar, shrieked, flailed his hands, and was hit by the car. His body flew up and up in the air, and down crazily, into the cobbled street.

On the far side of the plaza, one front wheel broken, the car stopped. People were running.

Susan went in and closed the French windows.

At twelve noon they came down the Official Palace steps together, arm in arm, their faces pale.

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" *Adiós, Señor,*" said the mayor behind them. " *Señora.*"

They stood in the plaza where the crowd was pointing at the blood.

" Will they want to see you again ? " asked Susan.

" No, we went over and over it. It was an accident. I lost control of the car. I wept for them. God knows I had to get my relief out somewhere. I *felt* like weeping. I hated to kill him. I've never wanted to do anything like that in my life."

" They won't prosecute you ? "

" They talked about it, but no. I talked faster. They believe me. It was an accident. It's over."

" Where will we go ? Mexico City ? "

" The car's in the garage. It'll be ready at four this afternoon. Then we'll get out."

" Will we be followed ? Was Simms working alone ? "

" I don't know. We'll have a little head start on them, I think."

The film people were coming out of the hotel as they approached. Mr. Melton hurried up, scowling. " I heard what happened. Too bad. Everything all right now ? Want to get your minds off it ? We're doing some preliminary shots up the street. If you want to watch, you're welcome. Come on, do you good."

They went.

They stood on the cobbled street while the film camera was being set up. Susan looked at the road leading down and away, at the highway going to Acapulco and the sea, past pyramids and ruins and little adobe towns with yellow walls, blue walls, purple walls and flaming bougainvillæa.

She thought: We shall take the roads, travel in clusters and crowds, in markets, in halls, bribe police to sleep near, keep double locks, but always the crowds, never alone again, always afraid that the next person who passes might be another Simms. Never knowing if we've tricked and lost the Searchers.

And always up ahead, in the Future, they'll wait for us to be brought back, waiting with their bombs to burn us and disease to rot us, and their police to tell us to roll over, turn round, jump through the hoop. And so we'll keep running through the forest, and we'll never ever stop or sleep well again in our lives.

A crowd gathered to watch the film being made. And Susan watched the crowd and the streets.

" Seen anyone suspicious ? "

" No. What time is it ? "

" Three o'clock. The car should be almost ready."

The test film was finished at three forty-five. They all walked down to the hotel, talking.

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William paused at the garage. " The car'll be ready at six," he said, coming out.

" But no later than that ? "

" It'll be ready, don't worry."

In the hotel lobby they looked round for other men travelling alone, men who resembled Mr. Simms, men with new haircuts and too much cigarette smoke and cologne smell about them, but the lobby was empty. Going up the stairs, Mr. Melton said, " Well, it's been a long, hard day. Who'd like a drink ? Martini ? Beer ? "

" Perhaps just one."

The whole crowd pushed into Mr. Melton's room and the drinking began.

" Watch the time," said William.

Time, thought Susan, if only they had time. All she wanted was to sit in the plaza all of a long, bright day in spring, with not a worry or a thought, with the sun on her face and arms, her eyes closed, smiling at the warmth—and never move, but just sleep in the Mexican sun . . .

Mr. Melton opened the champagne.

" To a very beautiful lady, lovely enough for films," he said, toasting Susan. " I might even give you a test."

She laughed.

" I mean it," said Melton. " You're very nice. I could make you a film star."

Susan glanced at William, and he lifted an eyebrow and nodded. It would be a change of scene, clothing, locale, name perhaps, and they would be travelling with eight other people, a good shield against any interference from the future.

" It sounds wonderful," said Susan.

She was feeling the champagne now, the afternoon was slipping by, the party was whirling about her, she felt safe and good and alive and truly happy for the first time in many years.

" What kind of film would my wife be suitable for ? " asked William, refilling his glass.

Melton appraised Susan. The party stopped laughing and listened.

" Well, I'd like to do a story of suspense," said Melton. " A story of a man and wife, like yourselves."

" Go on."

" Sort of a war story, perhaps," said the director, examining the colour of his drink against the sunlight.

Susan and William waited.

" A story about a man and wife who live in a little house on a little street in the year 2155, perhaps," said Melton. " This is *ad lib*,

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understand. But this man and wife are faced with a terrible war, Super-Plus Hydrogen bombs, censorship, death, in that year and—here's the trick—they escape into the past, followed by a man who they think is evil, but who is only trying to show them what their Duty is."

William dropped his glass to the floor.

Mr. Melton continued. " And this couple take refuge with a group of film people whom they learn to trust. Safety in numbers, they say to themselves."

Susan felt herself slip down into a chair. Everyone was watching the director.

He took a sip of wine. " Ah, that's a fine wine. Well, this man and woman, it seems, don't realize how important they are to the future. The man, especially, is the keystone to a new bomb metal. So the Searchers, let's call them, spare no trouble or expense to find, capture and take home the man and wife, once they get them totally alone, in a hotel room, where no one can see. Strategy. The Searchers work alone, or in groups of eight. One trick or another will do it.

" Don't you think it would make a wonderful film, Susan ? Don't you, Bill ? " He finished his drink.

Susan sat with her eyes straight ahead.

" Have a drink ? " said Mr. Melton.

William's gun was out and he fired three times ; one of the men fell, and the others ran forwards. Susan screamed. A hand was clamped to her mouth. Now the gun was on the floor and William was struggling with the men holding him.

Mr. Melton said, " Please," standing there where he had stood, blood showing on his fingers. " Let's not make matters worse."

Someone pounded on the door.

" Let me in ! "

" The manager," said Mr. Melton, dryly. He jerked his head. " Everyone, let's move ! "

" Let me in. I'll call the police ! "

Susan and William looked at each other quickly, and then at the door.

" The manager wishes to come in," said Mr. Melton. " Quick ! "

A camera was carried forward. From it shot a blue light which encompassed the room instantly. It widened out and the people of the party vanished, one by one.

" Quickly ! "

Outside the window in the instant before she vanished, Susan saw the green land and the purple and yellow and blue and crimson walls, and the cobbles flowing like a river, a man on a donkey riding into the warm hills, a boy drinking orange squash. She could feel the

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sweet liquid in her throat; she could see a man standing under a cool plaza tree with a guitar, could feel her hand upon the strings. And, far away, she could see the sea, the blue and tender sea; she could feel it roll over her and take her in.

And then she was gone. Her husband was gone.

The door burst wide. The manager and his staff rushed in.

The room was empty.

"But they were just here! I saw them come in, and now—gone!" cried the manager. "The windows are covered with iron grating; they couldn't get out that way!" . . .

In the late afternoon, the priest was summoned and they opened the room again and aired it out, and had him sprinkle holy water through each corner and give it his blessing.

"What shall we do with these?" asked the charwoman.

She pointed to the closet, where there were sixty seven bottles of chartreuse, cognac, *crème de cacao*, absinth, vermouth, tequila, one hundred and six packets of Turkish cigarettes, and a hundred and ninety eight yellow boxes of pure Havana cigars . . .

* * *

*ANSWERS to CASTLE IN THE AIR on page 58*

1. *The house of Mr. Badger, in the Wild Wood, in Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows."*
2. *The Attendant Spirit, "after in the habit of Thyrsis," in John Milton's masque "Comus," performed at Ludlow in 1634.*
3. *Manderley, the house of the de Winters, in the novel "Rebecca," by Daphne du Maurier.*
4. *The Mermaid Tavern in John Keats' poem "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern."*
5. *The Duchess' house in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
6. *Mariana in the moated grange, in the poem "Mariana," by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.*
7. *Miss Betsey Trotwood's cottage in "David Copperfield," by Charles Dickens.*
8. *The pleasure-dome at Xanadu of the Kubla Khan, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan."*
9. *Porphyria, who came to her lover's cottage, in Robert Browning's poem "Porphyria's Lover."*
10. *The Inn, where Miranda and her companion found "the fleas that tease in the High Pyrenees," in the poem "Tarantella," by Hilaire Belloc.*

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# HERE'S A HEALTH

**Teetotaller, read no further, this is not for you—unless you wish to be converted**

PAUL DE CASSAGNAC, 1842–1904, *French Wines*

When I was much younger than you, not above 32 years old, I had by my drinking water, and hating wine, got a swelling in my left Leg . . .

JONATHAN SWIFT, *22nd June*, 1736

## *Mother Redcap of Holloway*

*Old Mother Redcap, according to her tale,*
*Lived twenty and a hundred years by drinking*
*this good ale ;*
*It was her meat, it was her drink, and medicine*
*beside,*
*And if she still had drank this ale, she never*
*would have died.*

*Author Unknown*

## *Long Term Plan*

But now at long last the years began to take their toll of William . . . and when his legs began to fail him he determined, in a less compromising spirit than Mahomet's, that if he could not get to the drink the drink should come to him. There were obvious physical difficulties, however, in stocking his small farmhouse with sufficient beer for his needs ; the brewers' lorry would have had to climb the hill every week at least . . . He decided that the time had come to renounce his customary drink in favour of one which contained a higher percentage of happiness in a smaller bulk . . .

He took back from one of our annual Flower Shows, pushing it upon a large wheelbarrow, his biggest-ever vegetable marrow, which had been rejected by the judges and unkindly compared by those Philistines with Epstein's Genesis. He hacked it into convenient pieces, fermented it with sugar, and turned it into wine . . . and that same autumn he fermented a great quantity of damsons, greengages and plums. Thanks to this piece of forethought there was no thirsty gap in his life, no dry desert in his years. One evening he drank his last pint of beer in the *Adam and Eve*, hobbled painfully home on two sticks, and immediately celebrated his safe arrival by broaching the first cask of plum jerkum. He took to the stuff at once ; and cottagers who passed along the lane on their way home from the pub often declared that they had heard him bellowing with joy.

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The plum wine was finished in a couple of months, and then he started on the damson; and when that cask was dry he tackled the marrow, the gooseberry, the rhubarb and the black currant in turn. His taste was extremely catholic, and he was always experimenting . . . "Sometimes," he said, "I'm in the mood for Artichoke and sometimes I feels like Dandelion." He even made wine out of parsley, which caused the villagers to shake their heads, for we have an old superstition about Parsley wine, that it's for lazy husbands and shy wives—"What would old William want with such stuff, at his age?"

His friends and neighbours formed the habit of dropping in for a cordial glass or two to drive out the cold on chilly mornings or the damp on wet ones. But these guests reported that his stocks, despite the steady drain upon them, by no means diminished; for Mr. Hart . . . devised a long term plan: what industrialists would call a production-schedule; and the cheerful assumption underlying this plan was that he would live to be a hundred and that he would tend to drink more as he grew older.

JOHN MOORE, *The Blue Field*

## *Elixir*

*The Spirit of Wine*
*Sang in my glass, and I listened*
*With love to his odorous music,*
*His flushed and magnificent song.*

*—"I am health, I am heart, I am life!*
*For I give for the asking*
*The fire of my father the sun,*
*And the strength of my mother the earth . . .*

*"I am life, I am wealth, I am fame!*
*For I captain an army*
*Of shining and generous dreams;*
*And mine, too, all mine, are the keys*
*Of that secret spiritual shrine,*
*Where, his work-a-day soul put by,*
*Shut in with his saint of saints—*
*With his radiant and conquering self!—*
*Man worships, and talks, and is glad . . . ."*

*The Spirit of Wine*
*Sang in my heart, and I triumphed*
*In the savour and scent of his music,*
*His magnetic and mastering song.*

W. E. HENLEY, 1849–1903

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## *Penance*

*It was Mr. Western's custom every afternoon, as soon as he was drunk, to hear his daughter play upon the harpsichord . . .*

HENRY FIELDING, 1707–1754, *Tom Jones*

## *Take One Lusty Rooster . . .*

To make Cock Ale, take ten gallons of ale and a large cock, the older the better. Parboil the cock, flea him, and stamp him in a stone mortar until his bones are broken. You must craw and gut him when you flea him. Put him into two quarts of sack, and put to it 3 pounds of raisins of the sun stoned, some blades of mace, and a few cloves.

Put all these into a canvas bag, and a little while before you find the ale has done working, put the ale and bag together into a vessel. In a week or 9 days' time bottle it up, fill the bottles but just above the necks, and leave the same to ripen as other ale.

*Smith's Compleat Housewife*, 1736

## *I'm For Toleration*

*Oh some that's good and godly ones they hold*
*that it's a sin*
*To troll the jolly bowl around, and let the*
*dollars spin ;*
*But I'm for toleration and for drinking at an*
*inn,*
*Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan . . .*

JOHN MASEFIELD, *Captain Stratton's Fancy*

## *Saved*

Doctor Fordyce sometimes drank a good deal at dinner. He was summoned one evening to see a lady patient, when he was more than half-seas-over, and conscious that he was so. Feeling her pulse, and finding himself unable to count its beats, he muttered, " Drunk, by God ! " Next morning, recollecting the circumstances, he was greatly vexed : and just as he was thinking what explanation of his behaviour he should offer to the lady, a letter from her was put into his hand. " She too well knew," said the letter, " that he had discovered the unfortunate condition in which she was when he last visited her ; and she entreated him to keep the matter secret in consideration of the enclosed (a hundred pound bank-note)."

SAMUEL ROGERS, 1763–1855, *Table-talk*

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★*Since Agatha Christie gave to the world that legendary figure Hercule Poirot we have slept quietly in our bed o' nights. For what a guardian of the peace is that immaculate, whimsical little Belgian, with his neat striped trousers, correct black jacket, his egg shaped head with the immense moustache—and his infallible gift for getting his man—or woman. And then, after thirty years of vigilance M. Poirot resolved to retire from crime detection and pursue instead the cult of the vegetable marrow.*

*But by a happy chance he was diverted from his purpose for Hercule Poirot suddenly discovered the Classics—and for the first time in his life he came upon the adventures of his celebrated namesake. "For two hours," his author tells us, "Poirot read diligently, making notes, frowning and consulting books of reference." At last he sank back in his chair, shocked and disillusioned. "Hercules indeed!" cried Hercule Poirot. This was no hero. Just a brawny muscular creature of low intelligence and, indeed, criminal tendencies. Above all the brute lacked order and method.*

*Not so his modern counterpart. And yet, meditated Poirot, there was one point of resemblance between them. Both in their way had been instrumental in ridding the world of certain pests . . .*

*And into his mind crept a new idea. Once more the world should know a Hercules, and benefit by his Labours. Just these—and then he would retire. But first—*

# THE CASE OF THE NEMEAN LION

## by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"ANYTHING of interest this morning, Miss Lemon?" he asked as he entered the room the following morning.

He trusted Miss Lemon. She was a woman without imagination, but she had an instinct. Anything that she mentioned as worth consideration usually was worth consideration. She was a born secretary.

"Nothing much, M. Poirot. There is just one letter that I thought might interest you. I have put it on top of the pile."

"And what is that?" He took an interested step forward.

"It's from a man who wants you to investigate the disappearance of his wife's Pekinese dog."

Poirot paused with his foot still in the air. He threw a glance of deep reproach at Miss Lemon. She did not notice it. She had

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begun to type. She typed with the speed and precision of a quick-firing tank.

Poirot was shaken; shaken and embittered. Miss Lemon, the efficient Miss Lemon, had let him down! A Pekinese *dog*. A *Pekinese* dog! And after the dream he had had last night. He had been leaving Buckingham Palace after being personally thanked when his valet had come in with his morning chocolate!

Words trembled on his lips—witty caustic words. He did not utter them because Miss Lemon, owing to the speed and efficiency of her typing, would not have heard them.

With a grunt of disgust he picked up the topmost letter from the little pile on the side of his desk.

Yes, it was exactly as Miss Lemon had said. A city address—a curt businesslike unrefined demand. The subject—the kidnapping of a Pekinese dog. One of those bulging-eyed, over-pampered pets of a rich woman. Hercule Poirot's lip curled as he read it.

Nothing unusual about this. Nothing out of the way or—But yes, yes, in one small detail, Miss Lemon was right. In one small detail there *was* something unusual.

Hercule Poirot sat down. He read the letter slowly and carefully. It was not the kind of case he wanted, it was not the kind of case he had promised himself. It was not in any sense an important case, it was supremely unimportant. It was not—and here was the crux of his objection—it was not a proper Labour of Hercules.

But unfortunately he was curious . . .

Yes, he was curious . . .

He raised his voice so as to be heard by Miss Lemon above the noise of her typing.

"Ring up this Sir Joseph Hoggin," he ordered, "and make an appointment for me to see him at his office as he suggests."

As usual, Miss Lemon had been right.

"I'm a plain man, M. Poirot," said Sir Joseph Hoggin.

Hercule Poirot made a noncommittal gesture with his right hand. It expressed—if you chose to take it so—admiration for the solid worth of Sir Joseph's career and an appreciation of his modesty in so describing himself. It could also have conveyed a graceful deprecation of the statement. In any case it gave no clue to the thought then uppermost in Hercule Poirot's mind, which was that Sir Joseph certainly was—using the term in its more colloquial sense—a very plain man indeed.

Hercule Poirot's eyes rested critically on the swelling jowl, the small pig eyes, the bulbous nose and the close-lipped mouth. The whole general effect reminded him of someone or something—

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but for the moment he could not recollect who or what it was. A memory stirred dimly. A long time ago . . . in Belgium . . . something, surely, to do with *soap* . . .

Sir Joseph was continuing.

" No frills about me. I don't beat about the bush. Most people, M. Poirot, would let this business go. Write it off as a bad debt and forget about it. But that's not Joseph Hoggin's way. I'm a rich man—and in a manner of speaking two hundred pounds is neither here nor there to me—"

Poirot interpolated swiftly :

" I congratulate you."

" Eh ? "

Sir Joseph paused a minute. His small eyes narrowed themselves still more. He said sharply :

" That's not to say that I'm in the habit of throwing my money about. What I want I pay for. But I pay the market price—no more."

Hercule Poirot said, " You realize that my fees are high ? "

" Yes, yes. But this," Sir Joseph looked at him cunningly, " is a very small matter."

Hercule Poirot shrugged his shoulders. He said :

" I do not bargain. I am an expert. For the services of an expert you have to pay."

Sir Joseph said frankly :

" I know you're a first rate man at this sort of thing. I made enquiries and I was told that you were the best man available. I mean to get to the bottom of this business and I don't grudge the expense. That's why I got you to come here."

" You were fortunate," said Hercule Poirot.

Sir Joseph said " Eh ? " again.

" Exceedingly fortunate," said Hercule Poirot firmly. " I am, I may say so without undue modesty, at the apex of my career. Very shortly I intend to retire—to live in the country, to travel occasionally to see the world—also, it may be, to cultivate my garden—with particular attention to improving the strain of vegetable marrows. Magnificent vegetables—but they lack flavour. That, however, is not the point. I wished merely to explain that before retiring I had imposed upon myself a certain task. I have decided to accept twelve cases—no more, no less. A self-imposed 'Labours of Hercules ' if I may so describe it. Your case, Sir Joseph, is the first of the twelve. I was attracted to it," he sighed, " by its striking unimportance."

" Importance ? " said Sir Joseph.

" *Un*importance was what I said. I have been called in for varying causes—to investigate murders, unexplained deaths, robberies,

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thefts of jewellery. This is the first time that I have been asked to turn my talents to elucidate the kidnapping of a Pekinese dog."

Sir Joseph grunted. He said:

"You surprise me! I should have said you'd have had no end of women pestering you about their pet dogs."

"That, certainly. But it is the first time that I am summoned by the *husband* in the case."

Sir Joseph's little eyes narrowed appreciatively.

He said:

"I begin to see why they recommended you to me. You're a shrewd fellow, Mr. Poirot."

Poirot murmured:

"If you will now tell me the facts of the case. The dog disappeared, when?"

"Exactly a week ago."

"And your wife is by now quite frantic, I presume?"

Sir Joseph stared. He said:

"You don't understand. The dog has been returned."

"Returned? Then, permit me to ask, where do *I* enter the matter?"

Sir Joseph went crimson in the face.

"Because I'm damned if I'll be swindled! Now then, Mr. Poirot, I'm going to tell you the whole thing. The dog was stolen a week ago—in Kensington Gardens where he was out with my wife's companion. The next day my wife got a demand for two hundred pounds. I ask you—two hundred pounds! For a damned yapping little brute that's always getting under your feet anyway!"

Poirot murmured:

"You did not approve of paying such a sum, naturally?"

"Of course I didn't—or wouldn't have if I'd known anything about it! Milly, my wife, knew that well enough. She didn't say anything to *me*. Just sent off the money—in one pound notes as stipulated—to the address given."

"And the dog was returned?"

"Yes. That evening the bell rang and there was the little brute sitting on the doorstep. And not a soul to be seen."

"Perfectly. Continue."

"Then, of course, Milly confessed what she'd done and I lost my temper a bit. However, I calmed down after a while—after all, the thing was done and you can't expect a woman to behave with any sense—and I daresay I should have let the whole thing go if it hadn't been for meeting old Samuelson at the Club."

"Yes?"

"Damn it all, this thing must be a positive racket! Exactly the same thing had happened to him. *Three* hundred pounds they'd

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rooked *his* wife of! Well, that was a bit *too* much. I decided the thing had got to be stopped. I sent for you."

"But surely, Sir Joseph, the proper thing—and a very much more inexpensive thing—would have been to send for the police?"

Sir Joseph rubbed his nose.

He said:

"Are you married, Mr. Poirot?"

"Alas," said Poirot, "I have not that felicity."

"H'm," said Sir Joseph. "Don't know about felicity, but if you were, you'd know that women are funny creatures. My wife went into hysterics at the mere mention of the police—she'd got it into her head that something would happen to her precious Shan Tung if I went to them. She wouldn't hear of the idea—and I may say she doesn't take very kindly to the idea of *your* being called in. But I stood firm there and at last she gave way. But, mind you, she doesn't *like* it."

Hercule Poirot murmured:

"The position is, I perceive, a delicate one. It would be as well, perhaps, if I were to interview Madame your wife and gain further particulars from her whilst at the same time reassuring her as to the future safety of her dog?"

Sir Joseph nodded and rose to his feet. He said:

"I'll take you along in the car right away."

In a large, hot, ornately furnished drawing room two women were sitting.

As Sir Joseph and Hercule Poirot entered, a small Pekinese dog rushed forward, barking furiously, and circling dangerously round Poirot's ankles.

"Shan—Shan, come here. Come here to mother, darling. Pick him up, Miss Carnaby."

The second woman hurried forward and Hercule Poirot murmured:

"A veritable lion, indeed."

Rather breathlessly Shan Tung's captor agreed.

"Yes, indeed, he's such a *good* watch dog. He's not frightened of anything or any one. There's a lovely boy, then."

Having performed the necessary introduction, Sir Joseph said:

"Well, Mr. Poirot, I'll leave you to get on with it," and with a short nod he left the room.

Lady Hoggin was a stout, petulant-looking woman with dyed henna red hair. Her companion, the fluttering Miss Carnaby, was a plump, amiable-looking creature between forty and fifty. She treated Lady Hoggin with great deference and was clearly frightened to death of her.

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Poirot said :

" Now tell me, Lady Hoggin, the full circumstances of this abominable crime."

Lady Hoggin flushed.

" I'm very glad to hear you say *that*, Mr. Poirot. For it *was* a crime. Pekinese are terribly sensitive—just as sensitive as children. Poor Shan Tung might have died of fright if of nothing else."

Miss Carnaby chimed in breathlessly :

" Yes, it was wicked—*wicked !* "

" Please tell me the facts."

" Well, it was like this. Shan Tung was out for his walk in the Park with Miss Carnaby—"

" Oh dear me, yes, it was all my fault," chimed in the companion. " How could I have been so stupid—so careless—"

Lady Hoggin said acidly :

" I don't want to reproach you, Miss Carnaby, but I do think you might have been more *alert*."

Poirot transferred his gaze to the companion.

" What happened ? "

Miss Carnaby burst into voluble and slightly flustered speech.

" Well, it was the most extraordinary thing ! We had just been along the flower walk—Shan Tung was on the lead, of course—he'd had his little run on the grass—and I was just about to turn and go home when my attention was caught by a baby in a pram—such a lovely baby—it smiled at me—lovely rosy cheeks and such *curls*. I couldn't just resist speaking to the nurse in charge and I'm sure I was only speaking to her for about a minute or two, and then suddenly I looked down and Shan wasn't there any more. The lead had been cut right through—"

Lady Hoggin said :

" If you'd been paying proper attention to your duties, nobody could have sneaked up and cut that lead."

Miss Carnaby seemed inclined to burst into tears. Poirot said hastily :

" And what happened next ? "

" Well, of course I looked *everywhere*. And *called !* And I asked the park attendant if he'd seen a man carrying a Pekinese dog but he hadn't noticed anything of the kind—and I didn't know what to do—and I went on searching, but at last, of course, I *had* to come home—"

Miss Carnaby stopped dead. Poirot could imagine the scene that followed well enough. He asked :

" And then you received a letter ? "

Lady Hoggin took up the tale.

" By the first post the following morning. It said that if I

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wanted to see Shan Tung alive I was to send two hundred pound notes in an unregistered packet to Captain Curtis, 38 Bloomsbury Road Square. It said that if the money were marked or the police informed then—then—*Shan Tung's ears and tail would be—cut off !* "

Miss Carnaby began to sniff.

" So *awful*," she murmured. " How people can be such fiends ! "

Lady Hoggin went on :

" It said that if I sent the money at once, Shan Tung would be returned the same evening alive and well, but that if—if afterwards I went to the police, it would be Shan Tung who would suffer for it—"

Miss Carnaby murmured tearfully :

" Oh dear, I'm so afraid that even now—of course, M. Poirot isn't exactly the police—"

Lady Hoggin said anxiously :

" So you see, Mr. Poirot, you will have to be *very* careful."

Hercule Poirot was quick to allay her anxiety.

" But, I, I am not of the police. My enquiries, they will be conducted very discreetly, very quietly. You can be assured, Lady Hoggin, that Shan Tung will be perfectly safe. That I will *guarantee*."

Both ladies seemed relieved by the magic word. Poirot went on : " You have here the letter ? "

Lady Hoggin shook her head.

" No, I was instructed to enclose it with the money."

" And you did so ? "

" Yes."

" H'm, that is a pity."

Miss Carnaby said brightly :

" But I have the dog lead still. Shall I get it ? "

She left the room. Hercule Poirot profited by her absence to ask a few pertinent questions.

" Amy Carnaby ? Oh ! *she's* quite all right. A good soul, though foolish, of course. I have had several companions and they have *all* been complete fools. But Amy was devoted to Shan Tung and she was terribly upset over the whole thing—as well she might be—hanging over perambulators and neglecting my little sweetheart! These old maids are all the same, idiotic over babies ! No, I'm quite sure she had nothing whatever to do with it."

" It does not seem likely," Poirot agreed. " But as the dog disappeared when in her charge one must make quite certain of her honesty. She has been with you long ? "

" Nearly a year. I had excellent references with her. She was with old Lady Hartingfield until she died—ten years, I believe. After that she looked after an invalid sister for a while. She is

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really an excellent creature—but a complete fool, as I said."

Amy Carnaby returned at this minute, slightly more out of breath, and produced the cut dog lead which she handed to Poirot with the utmost solemnity, looking at him with hopeful expectancy.

Poirot surveyed it carefully.

"*Mais oui*," he said. "This has undoubtedly been cut."

The two women still waited expectantly. He said:

"I will keep this."

Solemnly he put it in his pocket. The two women breathed a sigh of relief. He had clearly done what was expected of him.

It was the habit of Hercule Poirot to leave nothing untested.

Though on the face of it it seemed unlikely that Miss Carnaby was anything but the foolish and rather muddle-headed woman that she appeared to be, Poirot nevertheless managed to interview a somewhat forbidding lady who was the niece of the late Lady Hartingfield.

"Amy Carnaby?" said Miss Maltravers. "Of course, remember her perfectly. She was a good soul and suited Aunt Julia down to the ground. Devoted to dogs and excellent at reading aloud. Tactful, too, never contradicted an invalid. What's happened to her? Not in distress of any kind, I hope. I gave her a reference about a year ago to some woman—name began with H—"

Poirot explained hastily that Miss Carnaby was still in her post. There had been, he said, a little trouble over a lost dog.

"Amy Carnaby is devoted to dogs. My aunt had a Pekinese. She left it to Miss Carnaby when she died and Miss Carnaby was devoted to it. I believe she was quite heartbroken when it died. Oh yes, she's a good soul. Not, of course, precisely *intellectual*."

Hercule Poirot agreed that Miss Carnaby could not, perhaps, be described as intellectual.

His next proceeding was to discover the park keeper to whom Miss Carnaby had spoken on the fateful afternoon. This he did without much difficulty. The man remembered the incident in question.

"Middle aged lady, rather stout—in a regular state she was—lost her Pekinese dog. I know her well by sight—brings the dog along most afternoons. I saw her come in with it. She was in a rare taking when she lost it. Came running to me to know if I'd seen anyone with a Pekinese dog! Well, I ask you! I can tell you, the Gardens is full of dogs—every kind—terriers, Pekes, German sausage-dogs—even them Borzois—all kinds we have. Not likely as I'd notice one Peke more than another."

Hercule Poirot nodded his head thoughtfully.

He went to 38 Bloomsbury Road Square.

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Nos. 38, 39 and 40 were incorporated together as the Balaclava Private Hotel. Poirot walked up the steps and pushed open the door. He was greeted inside by gloom and a smell of cooking cabbage with a reminiscence of breakfast kippers. On his left was a mahogany table with a sad looking chrysanthemum plant on it. Above the table was a big baize-covered rack into which letters were stuck.

Poirot stared at the board thoughtfully for some minutes. He pushed open a door on his right. It led into a kind of lounge with small tables and some so-called easy chairs covered with a depressing pattern of cretonne. Three old ladies and one fierce-looking old gentleman raised their heads and gazed venomously at the intruder. Hercule Poirot blushed and withdrew.

He walked farther along the passage and came to a staircase. On his right a passage branched at right angles to what was evidently the dining room.

A little way along this passage was a door marked "OFFICE."

On this Poirot tapped. Receiving no response, he opened the door and looked in. There was a large desk in the room covered with papers but there was no one to be seen. He withdrew, closing the door again. He penetrated to the dining room.

A sad looking girl in a dirty apron was shuffling about with a basket of knives and forks with which she was laying the tables.

Hercule Poirot said apologetically:

"Excuse me, but could I see the Manageress?"

The girl looked at him with lack-lustre eyes.

She said: "I don't know, I'm sure."

Hercule Poirot said: "There is no one in the office."

"Well, I don't know where she'd be, I'm sure."

"Perhaps," Hercule Poirot said, patient and persistent, "you could find out?"

The girl sighed. Dreary as her day's round was, it had now been made additionally so by this new burden laid upon her. She said sadly:

"Well, I'll see what I can do."

Poirot thanked her and removed himself once more to the hall, not daring to face the malevolent glare of the occupants of the lounge. He was staring up at the baize-covered letter rack when a rustle and a strong smell of Devonshire violets proclaimed the arrival of the Manageress.

Mrs. Harte was full of graciousness. She exclaimed:

"So sorry I was not in my office. You were requiring rooms?"

Hercule Poirot murmured:

"Not precisely. I was wondering if a friend of mine had been staying here lately. A Captain Curtis."

"Curtis," exclaimed Mrs. Harte. "Captain Curtis? Now

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where have I heard that name ? "

Poirot did not help her. She shook her head vexedly.

He said :

" You have not, then, had a Captain Curtis staying here ? "

" Well, not lately, certainly. And yet, you know, the name is certainly familiar to me. Can you describe your friend at all ? "

" That," said Hercule Poirot, " would be difficult." He went on : " I suppose it sometimes happens that letters arrive for people when in actual fact no one of that name is staying here ? "

" That does happen, of course."

" What do you do with such letters ? "

" Well, we keep them for a time. You see, it probably means that the person in question will arrive shortly. Of course, if letters or parcels are a long time here unclaimed, they are returned to the post office."

Hercule Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

He said :

" I comprehend." He added : " It is like this, you see. I wrote a letter to my friend here."

Mrs. Harte's face cleared.

" That explains it. I must have noticed the name on an envelope. But really we have so many ex-Army gentlemen staying here or passing through—Let me see now."

She peered up at the board.

Hercule Poirot said :

" It is not there now."

" It must have been returned to the postman, I suppose. I am *so* sorry. Nothing *important*, I hope ? "

" No, no, it was of no importance."

As he moved towards the door, Mrs. Harte, enveloped in her pungent odour of violets, pursued him.

" If your friend should come—"

" It is most unlikely. I must have made a mistake . . ."

" Our terms," said Mrs. Harte, " are very moderate. Coffee after dinner is included. I would like you to see one or two of our bed-sitting rooms . . ."

With difficulty Hercule Poirot escaped.

The drawing room of Mrs. Samuelson was larger, more lavishly furnished, and enjoyed an even more stifling amount of central heating than that of Lady Hoggin. Hercule Poirot picked his way giddily amongst gilded console tables and large groups of statuary.

Mrs. Samuelson was taller than Lady Hoggin and her hair was dyed with peroxide. Her Pekinese was called Nanki Poo. His bulging eyes surveyed Hercule Poirot with arrogance. Miss

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Keble, Mrs. Samuelson's companion, was thin and scraggy where Miss Carnaby had been plump, but she also was voluble and slightly breathless. She, too, had been blamed for Nanki Poo's disappearance.

"But really, Mr. Poirot, it was the most amazing thing. It all happened in a second. Outside Harrods it was. A nurse there asked me the time—"

Poirot interrupted her.

"A nurse? A hospital nurse?"

"No, no—a children's nurse. Such a sweet baby it was, too! A dear little mite. Such lovely rosy cheeks. They say children don't look healthy in London, but I'm sure—"

"Ellen," said Mrs. Samuelson.

Miss Keble blushed, stammered, and subsided into silence.

Mrs. Samuelson said acidly:

"And while Miss Keble was bending over a perambulator that had nothing to do with her, this audacious villain cut Nanki Poo's lead and made off with him."

Miss Keble murmured tearfully:

"It all happened in a second. I looked round and the darling boy was gone—there was just the dangling lead in my hand. Perhaps you'd like to see the lead, Mr. Poirot?"

"By no means," said Poirot hastily. He had no wish to make a collection of cut dog leads. "I understand," he went on, "that shortly afterwards you received a letter?"

The story followed the same course exactly—the letter—the threats of violence to Nanki Poo's ears and tail. Only two things were different—the sum of money demanded—three hundred pounds—and the address to which it was to be sent; this time it was to Commander Blackleigh, Pennington Hotel, 76 Clonmel Gardens, Kensington.

Mrs. Samuelson went on:

"When Nanki Poo was safely back again, I went to the place *myself*, Mr. Poirot. After all, three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds."

"Certainly it is."

"The very first thing I saw was my letter enclosing the money in a kind of rack in the hall. Whilst I was waiting for the proprietress I slipped it into my bag. Unfortunately—"

Poirot said: "Unfortunately, when you opened it it contained only blank sheets of paper."

"How did you know?" Mrs. Samuelson turned on him with awe.

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Obviously, *chère Madame*, the thief would take care to recover

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the money before he returned the dog. He would then replace the notes with blank paper and return the letter to the rack in case its absence should be noticed."

"No such person as Commander Blackleigh had ever stayed there."

Poirot smiled.

"And of course, my husband was extremely annoyed about the whole thing. In fact, he was livid—absolutely *livid!*"

Poirot murmured cautiously:

"You did not—er—consult him before dispatching the money?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Samuelson with decision.

Poirot looked a question. The lady explained.

"I wouldn't have risked it for a moment. Men are so extraordinary when it's a question of *money*. Jacob would have insisted on going to the police. I couldn't risk that. My poor darling Nanki Poo. *Anything* might have happened to him! Of course, I *had* to tell my husband *afterwards*."

Poirot murmured:

"Quite so—quite so."

"And I have really never seen him so angry. Men," said Mrs. Samuelson, rearranging her handsome diamond bracelet and turning her rings on her fingers, "think of nothing but money."

Hercule Poirot went up in the lift to Sir Joseph Hoggin's office. He sent in his card and was told that Sir Joseph was engaged at the moment but would see him presently. A haughty blonde sailed out of Sir Joseph's room at last with her hands full of papers. She gave the quaint little man a disdainful glance in passing.

Sir Joseph was seated behind his immense mahogany desk. There was a trace of lipstick on his chin.

"Well, Mr. Poirot? Sit down. Got any news for me?"

Hercule Poirot said:

"The whole affair is of a pleasing simplicity. In each case the money was sent to one of those boarding houses or private hotels where there is no porter or hall attendant and where a large number of guests are always coming and going, including a fairly large preponderance of ex-Service men. Nothing would be easier than for any one to walk in, abstract a letter from the rack, either take it away, or else remove the money and replace it with blank paper. Therefore, in every case, the trail ends abruptly in a blank wall."

"You mean you've no idea who the fellow is?"

"I have certain ideas, yes. It will take a few days to follow them up."

Sir Joseph looked at him curiously.

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"Good work. Then, when you have got anything to report—"

"I will report to you at your house."

Sir Joseph said:

"If you get to the bottom of this business, it will be a pretty good piece of work."

Hercule Poirot said:

"There is no question of failure. Hercule Poirot does not fail."

Sir Joseph Hoggin looked at the little man and grinned.

"Sure of yourself, aren't you?" he demanded.

"Entirely with reason."

"Oh well." Sir Joseph leaned back in his chair. "Pride goes before a fall, you know."

Hercule Poirot, sitting in front of his electric radiator, and feeling a quiet satisfaction in its neat geometrical pattern, was giving instructions to his valet and general factotum.

"You understand, Georges?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"More probably a flat or maisonette. And it will definitely be within certain limits. South of the Park, east of Kensington Church, west of Knightsbridge Barracks and north of Fulham Road."

"I understand perfectly, sir."

Poirot murmured:

"A curious little case. There is evidence here of a very definite talent for organization. And there is, of course, the surprising invisibility of the star performer—the Nemean Lion himself, if I may so style him. Yes, an interesting little case. I could wish that I felt more attracted to my client—but he bears an unfortunate resemblance to a soap manufacturer of Liége who poisoned his wife in order to marry a blonde secretary. One of my early successes."

Georges shook his head. He said gravely:

"These blondes, sir, they're responsible for a lot of trouble."

It was three days later when the invaluable Georges said:

"This is the address, sir."

Hercule Poirot took the piece of paper handed to him.

"Excellent, my good Georges. And what day of the week?"

"Thursdays, sir."

"Thursdays. And today, most fortunately, is a Thursday. So there need be no delay."

Twenty minutes later Hercule Poirot was climbing the stairs of an obscure block of flats tucked away in a little street leading off a more fashionable one. No. 10 Rosholm Mansions was on the third and top floor and there was no lift. Poirot toiled upwards round and round the narrow corkscrew staircase.

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He paused to regain his breath on the top landing and from behind the door of No. 10 a new sound broke the silence—the sharp bark of a dog.

Hercule Poirot nodded his head with a slight smile. He pressed the bell of No. 10.

The barking redoubled—footsteps came to the door, it was opened . . .

Miss Amy Carnaby fell back, her hand went to her ample breast.

"You permit that I enter?" said Hercule Poirot, and entered without waiting for the reply.

There was a sitting room door open on the right and he walked in. Behind him Miss Carnaby followed as though in a dream.

The room was very small and much overcrowded. Amongst the furniture a human being could be discovered, an elderly woman lying on a sofa drawn up to the gas fire. As Poirot came in, a Pekinese dog jumped off the sofa and came forward uttering a few sharp suspicious barks.

"Aha," said Poirot. "The chief actor! I salute you, my little friend."

He bent forward, extending his hand. The dog sniffed at it, his intelligent eyes fixed on the man's face.

Miss Carnaby murmured faintly:

"*So you know?*"

Hercule Poirot nodded.

"Yes, I know." He looked at the woman on the sofa. "Your sister, I think?"

Miss Carnaby said mechanically: "Yes, Emily, this—this is Mr. Poirot."

Emily Carnaby gave a gasp. She said: "Oh!"

Amy Carnaby said:

"Augustus . . ."

The Pekinese looked towards her—his tail moved—then he resumed his scrutiny of Poirot's hand. Again his tail moved faintly.

Gently Poirot picked the little dog up and sat down with Augustus on his knee. He said:

"So I have captured the Nemean Lion. My task is completed."

Amy Carnaby said in a hard dry voice:

"Do you really know everything?"

Poirot nodded.

"I think so. You organized this business—with Augustus to help you. You took your employer's dog out for his usual walk, brought him here and went on to the Park with Augustus. The park keeper saw you with a Pekinese as usual. The nurse girl, if we had ever found her, would also have agreed that you had a Pekinese with you when you spoke to her. Then, while you were

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talking, you cut the lead and Augustus, trained by you, slipped off at once and made a bee-line back home. A few minutes later you gave the alarm that the dog had been stolen."

There was a pause. Then Miss Carnaby drew herself up with a certain pathetic dignity. She said:

"Yes. It is all quite true. I—I have nothing to say."

The invalid woman on the sofa began to cry softly.

Poirot said:

"Nothing at all, Mademoiselle?"

Miss Carnaby said:

"Nothing. I have been a thief—and now I am found out."

Poirot murmured:

"You have nothing to say—in your own defence?"

A spot of red showed suddenly in Amy Carnaby's white cheeks. She said:

"I—I don't regret what I did. I think that you are a kind man, Mr. Poirot, and that possibly you might understand. You see, I've been so terribly *afraid*."

"Afraid?"

"Yes, it's difficult for a gentleman to understand, I expect. But you see, I'm not a clever woman at all, and I've no training and I'm getting older—and I'm so terrified for the future. I've not been able to save anything—how could I with Emily to be cared for?—and as I get older and more incompetent there won't be any one who wants me. They'll want somebody young and brisk. I've—I've known so many people like I am—nobody wants you and you live in one room and you can't have a fire or any warmth and not very much to eat, and at last you can't even pay the rent of your room . . . There are Institutions, of course, but it's not very easy to get into them unless you have influential friends, and I haven't. There are a good many others situated like I am—poor companions—untrained useless women with nothing to look forward to but a deadly fear . . ."

Her voice shook. She said:

"And so—some of us, got together and—and I thought of this. It was really having Augustus that put it into my mind. You see, to most people, one Pekinese is very much like another. Really, of course, it's ridiculous. No one who knew could mistake Augustus for Nanki Poo or Shan Tung or any of the other Pekes. He's *far* more intelligent for one thing, and he's *much* handsomer, but, as I say, to most people a Peke is just a Peke. Augustus put it into my head—that, combined with the fact that so many rich women have Pekinese dogs."

Poirot said with a faint smile:

"It must have been a profitable—racket! How many are

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there in the—the gang? Or perhaps I had better ask how often operations have been successfully carried out?"

Miss Carnaby said simply:

"Shan Tung was the sixteenth."

Hercule Poirot raised his eyebrows.

"I congratulate you. Your organization must have been indeed excellent."

Emily Carnaby said:

"Amy was always good at organization. Our father—he was the Vicar of Kellington in Essex—always said that Amy had quite a genius for planning. She always made all the arrangements for the Socials and the Bazaars and all that."

Poirot said with a little bow:

"I agree. As a criminal, Mademoiselle, you are quite in the first rank."

Amy Carnaby cried:

"A criminal. Oh dear, I suppose I am. But—but it never felt like that."

"How did it feel?"

"Of course, you are quite right. It was breaking the law. But you see—how can I explain it? Nearly all these women who employ us are so very rude and unpleasant. Lady Hoggin, for instance, doesn't mind *what* she says to me. She said her tonic tasted unpleasant the other day and practically accused me of *tampering* with it. All that sort of thing." Miss Carnaby flushed. "It's really very unpleasant. And not being able to say anything or answer back makes it *rankle* more, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," said Hercule Poirot.

"And then seeing money frittered away so wastefully—that is upsetting. And Sir Joseph, occasionally he used to describe a *coup* he had made in the City—sometimes something that seemed to me—of course, I know I've only got a woman's brain and don't understand finance—downright *dishonest*. Well, you know, M. Poirot, it all—it all *unsettled* me, and I felt that to take a little money away from these people who really wouldn't miss it and hadn't been too scrupulous in acquiring it—well, really it hardly seemed wrong at all."

Poirot murmured:

"A modern Robin Hood! Tell me, Miss Carnaby, did you ever have to carry out the threats you used in your letters?"

"Threats?"

"Were you ever compelled to mutilate the animals in the way you specified?"

Miss Carnaby regarded him in horror.

"Of course I would never have dreamed of doing such a thing!

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That was just—just an artistic touch."

"Very artistic. It worked."

"Well, of course I knew it would. I know how I should have felt about Augustus, and of course I had to make sure these women never told their husbands until afterwards. The plan worked beautifully every time. In nine cases out of ten the companion was given the letter with the money to post. We usually steamed it open, took out the notes, and replaced them with paper. Once or twice the woman posted it herself. Then, of course, the companion had to go to the hotel and take the letter out of the rack. But that was quite easy, too."

"And the nursemaid touch? Was it always a nursemaid?"

"Well, you see, M. Poirot, old maids are known to be foolishly sentimental about babies. So it seemed quite *natural* that they should be absorbed over a baby and not notice anything."

Hercule Poirot sighed. He said:

"Your psychology is excellent, your organization is first class, and you are also a very fine actress. Your performance the other day when I interviewed Lady Hoggin was irreproachable. Never think of yourself disparagingly, Miss Carnaby. You may be what is termed an untrained woman but there is nothing wrong with your brains or with your courage."

Miss Carnaby said with a faint smile:

"And yet I have been found out, M. Poirot."

"Only by *me*. That was inevitable! When I had interviewed Mrs. Samuelson I realized that the kidnapping of Shan Tung was one of a series. I had already learned that you had once been left a Pekinese dog and had an invalid sister. I had only to ask my invaluable servant to look for a small flat within a certain radius occupied by an invalid lady who had a Pekinese dog and a sister who visited her once a week on her day out. It was simple."

Amy Carnaby drew herself up. She said:

"You have been very kind. It emboldens me to ask you a favour. I cannot, I know, escape the penalty for what I have done. I shall be sent to prison, I suppose. But if you could, M. Poirot, avert some of the *publicity*. So distressing for Emily—and for those few who knew us in the old days. I could not, I suppose, go to prison under a *false name?* Or is that a *very* wrong thing to ask?"

Hercule Poirot said:

"I thing I can do more than that. But first of all I must make one thing quite clear. This ramp has got to *stop*. There must be no more disappearing dogs. All that is finished!"

"Yes! Oh yes!"

"And the money you extracted from Lady Hoggin must be returned."

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Amy Carnaby crossed the room, opened the drawer of a bureau and returned with a packet of notes which she handed to Poirot.

"I was going to pay it into the pool today."

Poirot took the notes and counted them. He got up.

"I think it possible, Miss Carnaby, that I may be able to persuade Sir Joseph not to prosecute."

"Oh, M. Poirot!"

Amy Carnaby clasped her hands. Emily gave a cry of joy. Augustus barked and wagged his tail.

"As for you, *mon ami*," said Poirot addressing him. "There is one thing that I wish you would give me. It is your mantle of invisibility that I need. In all these cases nobody for a moment suspected that there was a *second* dog involved. Augustus possessed the lion's skin of invisibility."

"Of course, M. Poirot, according to the legend, Pekinese *were* lions once. And they still have the *hearts* of lions!"

"Augustus is, I suppose, the dog that was left to you by Lady Hartingfield and who is reported to have died? Were you never afraid of him coming home alone through the traffic?"

"Oh no, M. Poirot, Augustus is very clever about traffic. I have trained him most carefully. He has even grasped the principle of One Way Streets."

"In that case," said Hercule Poirot, "he is superior to most human beings!"

Sir Joseph received Hercule Poirot in his study. He said:

"Well, Mr. Poirot? Made your boast good?"

"Let me first ask you a question," said Poirot as he seated himself. "I know who the criminal is and I think it possible that I can produce sufficient evidence to convict this person. But in that case I doubt if you will ever recover your money."

"Not get back my *money?*"

Sir Joseph turned purple.

Hercule Poirot went on:

"But I am not a policeman. I am acting in this case solely in your interests. I could, I think, recover your money intact, if no proceedings were taken."

"Eh?" said Sir Joseph. "That needs a bit of thinking about."

"It is entirely for you to decide. Strictly speaking, I suppose you ought to prosecute in the public interest. Most people would say so."

"I dare say they would," said Sir Joseph sharply. "It wouldn't be *their* money that had gone west. If there's one thing I hate it's to be swindled. Nobody's ever swindled me and got away with it."

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"Well then, what do you decide?"

Sir Joseph hit the table with his fist.

"I'll have the brass! Nobody's going to say they got away with two hundred pounds of my money."

Hercule Poirot rose, crossed to the writing-table, wrote out a cheque for two hundred pounds and handed it to the other man.

Sir Joseph said in a weak voice:

"Well, I'm damned! Who the devil *is* this fellow?"

Poirot shook his head.

"If you accept the money, there must be no questions asked."

Sir Joseph folded up the cheque and put it in his pocket.

"That's a pity. But the money's the thing. And what do I owe you, Mr. Poirot?"

"My fees will not be high. This was, as I said, a very *unimportant* matter." He paused—and added, "Nowadays nearly all my cases are murder cases . . ."

Sir Joseph started slightly.

"Must be interesting?" he said.

"Sometimes. Curiously enough, you recall to me one of my early cases in Belgium, many years ago—the chief protagonist was very like you in appearance. He was a wealthy soap manufacturer. He poisoned his wife in order to be free to marry his secretary . . . Yes—the resemblance is very remarkable . . ."

A faint sound came from Sir Joseph's lips—they had gone a queer blue colour. All the ruddy hue had faded from his cheeks. His eyes, starting out of his head, stared at Poirot. He slipped down a little in his chair.

Then, with a shaking hand, he fumbled in his pocket. He drew out the cheque and tore it into pieces.

"That's washed out—see? Consider it as your fee."

"Oh but, Sir Joseph, my fee would not have been as large as that."

"That's all right. You keep it."

"I shall send it to a deserving charity."

"Send it anywhere you damn well like."

Poirot leaned forward. He said:

"I think I need hardly point out, Sir Joseph, that in your position, you would do well to be exceedingly careful."

Sir Joseph said, his voice almost inaudible:

"You needn't worry. I shall be careful all right."

Hercule Poirot left the house. As he went down the steps he said to himself:

"So—*I was right.*"

Lady Hoggin said to her husband that evening:

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"Funny, this tonic tastes quite different. It hasn't got that bitter taste any more. I wonder why?"

Sir Joseph growled:

"Chemist. Careless fellows. Make things up differently different times."

Lady Hoggin said doubtfully: "I suppose that must be it."

"Of course it is. What else could it be?"

"Has the man found out anything about Shan Tung?"

"Yes. He got me my money back all right."

"Who was it?"

"He didn't say. Very close fellow, Hercule Poirot. But you needn't worry."

"He's a funny little man, isn't he?"

Sir Joseph gave a slight shiver and threw a sideways glance upwards as though he felt the invisible presence of Hercule Poirot behind his right shoulder. He had an idea that he would always feel it there.

He said: "He's a damned clever little devil!"

And he thought to himself: "Greta can go hang! *I'm* not going to risk my neck for *any* damned platinum blonde!"

And that same evening, Amy Carnaby gazed down incredulously at the cheque for two hundred pounds. She cried:

"Emily! *Emily!* Listen to this.

*Dear Miss Carnaby,*

*Allow me to enclose a contribution to your very deserving Fund before it is finally wound up.*

*Yours very truly,*
*Hercule Poirot.*"

"Amy," said Emily Carnaby, "you've been incredibly lucky. Think where you might be now."

"Wormwood Scrubs—or is it Holloway?" murmured Amy Carnaby. "But that's all over now—isn't it, Augustus? No more walks to the Park with mother or mother's friends and a little pair of scissors."

A far away wistfulness came into her eyes. She sighed.

"Dear Augustus! It seems a pity. He's so clever . . . One could teach him anything . . ."

* * *

*OFF DUTY*

The ant may be small and busy, but he seems to get round to all the best picnics.

From *Cosmopolitan*

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# LOST WITH ALL HANDS

**"Better to keep it dark," he said firmly**

## by CUTCLIFFE HYNE

IT seems that even to this day men look upon the foundering of the *Sturtgart* as a case of "all hands," and I know it did get into the papers that out of the four hundred and three men and women that sailed in her out of Corunna not one ever touched land again, except those few that the sea washed up on some of the Portuguese reefs as smashed and draggled corpses. But I was on board that steamer myself at the time of her accident.

I'd signed on in Hamburg, and I'm sitting here now in Ballindrochater: and that English coal-trimmer who called himself Vaughan also reached shore again, none the worse for what he'd gone through, save for that cut the oarblade gave him just above the bridge of his nose. Whether Vaughan has met his latter end since is beyond my knowledge. I haven't set eyes on the man since we parted.

The *Sturtgart* was a Clyde-built ship, and in the 'sixties had been one of the fliers of the Western Ocean trade. They'd driven her then pretty hard, you may bet; but that was in the days of low pressure, and bumping into the head seas at seven knots hadn't done her very much harm. When she was cast from the passenger line she was put on to cargo for a bit till she got too slow and extravagant; then she was sold to a Copenhagen firm who went broke over her, and finally she was bought by the Germans for the River Plate run. They put triple expansions in her, and sent her out of Hamburg four voyages a year, and by cutting expenses, and getting bounties, they made fine dividends.

It's nothing to my credit that a man of abilities like mine should have been on such a vessel at all. But I may as well admit that I'd been at my old games again, and had little choice left me. That salvage job in the Canaries was just over, and there was that forty pound bonus. Anyone but a cur would have sent the money to the old lady at home, but I thought I'd just begin on it; and, of course, once a start was made, the whole lot went tripping into other folk's pouches.

I'm generally a very careful man, but with whisky in me, you

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might think I was Rockefeller from the way I can fling good money about.

When I was quite broke, I must needs try and borrow from a policeman. I'd stood him beer when my luck was in, and told him I was due to have something back from him. He replied by calling me Scotch, and that's a thing I'll take from no man when I've the drink in me. So I just told him who I considered his mother might be, and we had it out there and then in the street.

Gosh, but that was a fight! We'd a crowd round us of men, and bairns, and barefoot women forty deep. We fought it out with naked fists, and at last he went down whack on the paving stones, and stayed there. I wanted to stop and preach over his prostrate body—I do get a bit argumentative at these times—but the crowd were kindly, and hustled me off out of mischief's way, and somehow or other I got to my lodgings.

It must have been a dozen hours later when I woke; but there was the fellow's helmet to remind me of my evening's entertainment; and it didn't take much thinking to know it would be healthiest for me to clear out quick. They value their police in Liverpool, and make them expensive to crumple up, as I'd found out before. And besides, if I was caught, even if they did give me the option—which was unlikely—empty pockets will pay no fine.

So I just slipped away without ostentation by ways I knew, and before two more hours were over I was travelling down Liverpool river in a Dutchman's stokehold.

It was she that dropped me in Hamburg, and I'd have liked to have spent a night or so up at San Pauli just for the sake of old times. But it couldn't be done. I was cleaned out, and I had just to take the handiest berth that offered, and that was fourth on the *Sturtgart*. I was as good a man as her second or third, or for that matter as good as her chief. But I didn't grumble. I was glad enough to get any engineer rating. It was luck I didn't have to sign on as fireman.

The *Sturtgart*'s engines were, as I've said, triple expansion, and when I got to handling them I gained respect. All the other officers down there were Dutchmen, but I will say they treated me like a gentleman, and saw I knew my job. They all spoke English, too; these foreigners have to, with such beastly languages of their own; and they were glad enough to listen to me whenever I chose to talk.

I never could make out, though, whether they were very plucky or very ignorant. The state of the *Sturtgart* never seemed to affect them at all, and there was no doubt but that she was a terror. I've sailed in some baddish wrecks in my time, but this

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*Sturtgart* was way ahead of all of them. Two boilers and the engines were the only new things about her, and you wondered how everything else held together. Every second plate had concrete over the rivets, and you could crumble most of the frames into rust scales with your fingers.

We picked up dirty weather as soon as we had dropped our Elbe pilot, and the way she buckled and squealed and clattered was a caution. With a head sea we hardly dared do more than give her bare headway. If she'd raced badly, the propeller would have shaken the stern frames clean out of her. And she leaked too. We had to keep one bilge pump running watch and take care if we didn't want to have water washing over our footplates.

I can tell you I didn't like it at all, and off the Forelands I said so to the chief in pretty squarish words.

He shrugged his shoulders. "She is an illusdration of cutting dze exbenses," says he. "You will soon get used to her, Herr McTodd. She only wants a bid of nursing. This is dze way we Chermans make money. We buy dze ships from you Britishers after you done mit dem, und den we r-run dem to big profit. Blitzen!" says he, "what would become of dze old sheeps if dere vas no one to buy dem after dey vas too shlow for your r-rush-ahead freights?"

"Well, it's a point," said I.

"Dey vas not yet fit for der sheep-breaker, Herr McTodd," says he. "Dere is profit still to be made from dem, und we Chermans do it—mit cutting dze exbenses."

"You'll cut a bit too deep, and slit your own throat as well, if you don't mind."

"Ach, no," says he. "We Chermans take good care of ourselves always. Joost throttle her down half a turn, Herr Mac. She race badly some more in dese pig-seas of your Channel."

Well, of course, that was their way of looking at it. But for myself, if I've got to sail in wrecks like this *Sturtgart* I like to have extra pay to square up the risk, and that's a thing these Dutchmen don't see at all. However, as you know, I wasn't there quite by my own choice, so I made up my mind to go across with her to Buenos Aires, and then run if anything in the way of a snugger berth offered itself.

But in the meantime we'd got to get there, and that was a longish job. There's one thing about these foreign vessels, you're not expected to drive them like you are English boats; tomorrow's as good as today; and as long as you're there on watch, they don't ask you to keep your firemen and trimmers everlastingly on the hop. They use that beastly patent brick coal, and it's stuff that only makes steam deliberately.

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We were only making short passages to begin with; we wanted passengers and cargo both; and we'd to look in at six French and Spanish ports to get them. Corunna was our last place of call. We'd some two thousand demijohns of Hamburg *aguardiénte* to put ashore there, and some ninety tons of cargo and ninety Spaniards besides to take on board. It was a six hour job at the most, but we took two mortal days to do it.

Lord! I would have made the lazy beggars hump themselves if I'd been skipper! And then we made our final clearance. There were four hundred and three souls on board the *Sturtgart* when she let go her warps that afternoon, and only two of us were ever to smell land again. It's pretty awful when you think about it.

It was dark and breezing up when we cleared Corunna harbour, and outside there was an ugly run of sea ready waiting for us. There was a noise about the ship that struck me like a dirge; there were three hundred and fifty passengers, all poor folk emigrating, and all moaning with sea-sickness; and the old steamer herself, straining in the seas, was filled with groans from every part of her, as though she had been a live thing in mortal pain from the wrenches.

The night came away thick as a hedge with spindrift and driving rain, and news got down to the engine-room that we'd missed a homeward-bound P. and O. by a short fathom, and that her officers had been cursing blue lightnings off their upper bridge.

That was off Finisterre. But the blow shifted round a point or two more to the southward when we'd rounded the Cape, and when we got the full weight of it, we in the engine-room had too many duties of our own to think of to leave time for worry about what was the business of those on deck. You see, with that enormous head sea, the propeller was out of water half its time, and we just had to throttle her down. If she'd raced badly the whole thing would have been U.P. in a couple of minutes. Even as it was, giving her about one-quarter steam, you'd have thought that the engines would have jumped clear of their bedplates when the propeller rose into the wind over the back of a sea.

At every heave scummy black water swilled knee high over our foot-plates, and although both bilge-pumps were clacking away for all they were worth, it was all they could do to keep it under. She leaked everywhere. There was a weep round every plate; the rivets kept perpetually dropping out of her; and every time she shipped it green over the decks, it came down through our skylights and through the fiddley in regular cascades.

There was no doubt it was a devil of a night, and equally small doubt it was no weather for the *Sturtgart*. Even the old chief

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owned that. "It looks," I heard him say, "as though dey'd cut dze exbenses a bid too fine dis drip."

"I take it," said I, "that this shipload of people is off to hell very quick. There's one thing, though; they'll stoke up fires there ready for when the directors of your company come down to join them."

"Dose diregtors vas to blame, Herr Mac, and dot's a fact," says the chief. "Dey haf been too hungry after deir profits." He had his ear at the bridge speaking-tube. "Herr Gott!" says he, "here's der Ole Man saying she hasn't way enough for him to keeb her head on to der blarsted seas. If I give her more steam it vill jump dze engines right outside of herself."

He shouted back an answer, and went off to see for himself. I didn't expect to live the night through, and I don't think anybody else in the engine-room did either, but we went on with the work for all that as though nothing was happening. I will say that for those Dutch engineers; they didn't show funk. But routine's a great thing.

All this time the water in her had been getting worse. At times we'd been dry when she rolled her other bilge down the hill, or else we'd have a regular sea swilling about us, hip deep, with a scum on it of oil and coal-dust that left ridges on our clothes as it ebbed, like you see on a river bank after the spate-water's fallen. The place was full of steam, too, from the swill slopping against the boiler fires, and our lights showed through it dimly, like street-lamps in a fog.

As the water got deeper in our engine-room, the bilge-pumps might have been standing for all the good they seemed to do; the pressure was running down, too, in the gauges because the fires were getting swamped; but I think it was a bit of an accident from outside that gave her the final quietus. We felt the numb of a shock—not much, you know, but just enough to swear by; and the cold water deepened round us by inches to the minute. I think she must have struck some floating wreckage; blundered on to it as like as not with her broadside; and it was too much for her. A stouter ship wouldn't have heeded a knock like that, but the *Sturtgart* was old and frail, and she stove in like eggshell, and then it was sea-floor for her and no excuse.

Well, one might as well be drowned where one was as out in the cold wet gale on deck, so when the chief and the others went up the ladder, I stayed. I climbed to the mid-platform and put my back against a warm oil standard. There's a companionship about engines, and besides, if God sees you peg out sticking to the work you're paid for, I've a notion He won't forget it when He's squaring up His account-book.

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The engines died hard. Someone from the bridge telegraphed for "Full Speed," and I opened the throttle, and they jumped ahead like live things. It didn't matter what they carried away then; but all held, and the spurt didn't last for long. They slowed as though they were sick, poor beggars; they'd less than fifty pounds of steam left; and then they took to stopping on the turn.

It made me wet-eyed to think about them, fine triple-expansions like those, thrown away in a rotten hull like the *Sturtgart*'s.

Then someone flung open the door above, and bawled down: "Hey, McTodd, are you below there?"

"Aye, aye, sir," said I.

"Then quit that engine-room you damned fool, and come out on deck and get drowned like a Christian."

I never found out who gave that order, but I did as I was bidden. The engines, poor things, were as good as dead already. Mortal man would never handle valve again on them till all the seas were drained.

The torment of the *Sturtgart* would have ranked as bad even in hell. She rolled in the trough as helpless as a crazy drainpipe, and you wondered why she did not turn turtle altogether. First one covering board squelched fathoms deep in the sea, and then the other swooped down to an even greater depth. The emigrants inside her lay sick in their bunks, and drowned there like rats in the noisy dark.

The ship had boats in abundance when she left the Elbe, but if you ask me where they were then, I could not say. The seas were making a clean breach over her. And I've never seen the like of those seas! They were no ordinary waves. They were great green mountains of water that hit down upon the decks like earthquakes. No vessel built by man could have long withstood that pounding; and the *Sturtgart* was wearily old, and long overdue to meet her end.

Bridge, boats, skylights, and rail were all over the side when first I came on deck; and as I lay there hanging on to a stanchion stump, I knew that more was swept away every time the tearing seas sluiced across her fabric. But I could see nothing in detail; all lights were out by then; all was inky blackness, and beating water, and ponderous bellowing noise. It was horrible to have to die helpless in the peopled dark like that.

If I'd been one of those writing fellows, I could have put down a lot about how the Old Man and his officers acted, and how attempts were made to save the passengers and all that, the same as you read in your evening newspaper. But, in any case, I saw nothing; it was all dark, cold, and numbing; and no orders could

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have been heard, even if any were given; and for the matter of that I didn't see anyone to carry them out. I myself hung on to that stanchion for it might have been two hours—though I wouldn't swear it was above two minutes—and then the deck seemed to break up beneath me, and I found myself soused over ears in the sea.

I tried to drown and could not. The spirit was willing, but the swimming instinct was strong in me. I trod water, breathed the wet air, and cursed myself for being weak enough to let the agony be prolonged. I shouted aloud into the storm that I was done with life, that death might have me when it wished; and then something grey and solid loomed out through the blackness. It was one of the *Sturtgart*'s lifeboats. She was riding keel uppermost. My knuckles scraped against her side.

I worked round, hooked a finger into one of her rudder gudgeons, and so rested; and presently when a wave righted her, I clambered inside over the sternsheets. The oars were made fast along the thwarts. I slipped one from the lashing and passed it through the grummet on the sternpost. She was full of water and very unhandy, but I got her round head to sea and that saved her from capsizing again.

At that moment a queer thing happened. The siren of the *Sturtgart* gave a preliminary cough to get the water out of the pipe, and then it went *whoop-a-doodle-doo!* for all the world like a Thames tugboat larking down river with excursionists.

I turned round and stared. I could just make out the loom of her faintly through the blackness. She tried another crow, but it was very faint, and she only got half through with it when up went her stem in the air with the water pouring off it in wild cascades. The stern dipped beneath the sea. Then a wave reared up ahead of me and blocked the view, and when my boat had ridden over it, the steamer was gone. There was nothing around me but huge black waves, roaring and leaping against a darker blackness.

I bawled out any words which came to my mouth. I wanted company; and if anyone still floated and lived, I hoped the shouts would draw them to the lifeboat. I didn't expect to live out the gale—although you can bet I wasn't going to give up till I was forced—but when it came to dying, I wanted someone to die with me, even if it was only a Dutchman. A man never knows what loneliness really means till he's tasted times like that.

A lot of time passed—it might have been another two hours, or it might have been more, or less; I haven't much notion—and then a voice hailed me from the water. I couldn't scull the boat towards it, because, with the water up to her thwarts, she was

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about unmanageable; but I hailed back, and presently a fellow swam slowly up out of the darkness, swooping thirty feet up and down on the waves.

He was slow in getting on board. In fact he missed a dozen chances, and I thought he was numbed with the cold. But at last I saw that he'd got a grating in tow with someone else hanging to it whom he would not desert; and, finally, when he did get hold of the gunwale, he'd the other chap's neckscruff in his spare hand.

I made shift to get them both in over the side, and there they lay like a couple of wet clouts across a thwart, with the water washing backwards and forwards over them. I couldn't help; I was up to my eyes in the steering; besides, what did it matter, as there was small chance of anything but drowning for the lot of us?

But presently the chap who had been swimming straightened himself and sat up. Day was beginning to get into the sky, and by that time we could see one another a little. Presently he said, "By the living powers, it's McTodd!"

"Hullo," I said, "are you English?"

"You bet," said he. "I was in the stokehold, but not in your watch. This other Johnnie is English too. He was a passenger, and third class at that. But he seems well off. He offered me a cool thousand, cash down, if I'd save his life, and I've had a shy at it. He isn't much of a specimen—a runaway shopkeeper, I should think—but he was English, so I thought I'd stick to him. I suppose we three are the only ones the sea hasn't grabbed? Well, Rule Britannia! Did you hear the old *Sturtgart* giving her final crow?"

"It was loud enough."

"That was me. I found the whistle string lying handy, and just fired off a *cock-a-doodle-doo* like one used to on the launch on fireworks nights at Henley and those places. I tried a second crow, but she hadn't wind enough for it, so I grabbed the shopkeeper here, and the grating, and just jumped. Much obliged to you for giving us room in the lifeboat, Mr. McTodd."

"You'll have to work your passage, then," said I, "or it's likely you'll be split within the next minute or so. Get your hands to work and scoop this water overboard."

"Aye, aye, sir," said he, and started in, and I went on straining every muscle at my employment. I think the gale began to lessen a little from then onwards, but the sea was running as high as ever; and it was weary work keeping that heavy boat nose-on to it with the steering oar. But after he'd cleared the water from her nearly down to the floor gratings, my fireman found a rope in the fore locker, and made it fast to the spare oars, and threw them

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overboard: and in another minute we were riding snugly to a sea anchor which broke all the combers before they reached us.

"I'm very glad to have you," said I to the fireman. "What might be your name?"

"What's it matter?" says he. "Besides, I forget. No, by the way, I don't, though. I signed on as J. Vaughan. Yes, I'm Vaughan—at your service, Mr. McTodd. But look here, I say, what's wrong with trying to pull back the shopkeeper into life again? I think I saw him stir just now."

We took the other man from where he lay, and sat the pair of us on an afterthwart with him between to try and coax some warmth into his body. I cannot say he looked healthy. His face was grey, and all his limbs were limp. He was a little, plump, soft-handed man, of the sort that can't stand rough treatment, and the sea had washed most of the life clean out of him. He opened his eyes after a bit, and "Where are we?" he asked.

"Open boat cruising somewhere off the Portuguese coast," says Vaughan, "and I'm sure I hope you like it."

"Yes, but where am I?" he says again, feebly.

"If you want to know your personal position," said Vaughan, "I should say you were very near hell."

That seemed to wake him, and he stared at the tearing seas with wild round eyes, and seemed to remember. "Shall we be saved?" he asked.

"We aren't drowned yet," says Vaughan. "But whether we shall get to the dry mud again is more than I can say. By the way, you owe me a thousand pounds."

"What for?"

"Services rendered. If you don't pay it, I've a good mind to put you back in the water again. I fancy you're a bit of a Jonah."

The man shuddered. "You know what I'm here for, then?"

"From what you let drop on the *Sturtgart* when you'd got the fear of God very near to you, I should say you are a shopkeeper of sorts absconding with someone else's money."

"I am a bank manager, sir."

"Same thing. I don't suppose they'll take much count of the difference when you land at the place you're going to."

"Do you think I'm dying, then?" says the man in a whisper.

"For that matter, I wouldn't purchase the lives of any of us for much. But so far as looks go, you're the least healthy."

"It's been the cold; and my heart's bad: I came on this voyage for my health."

"Ragged clothes, newly-shaven moustache, third class berth on a German emigrant ship," says Vaughan, totting off the items on his fingers. "It's the sort of way a banker would travel for the

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benefit of his health. I believe, my son, I know precisely the kind of health you mean. Have you got the boodle on you?"

The man had sunk into a kind of torpor. Vaughan shook him, and repeated his question. "Have you got the money on you?" he asked.

"I changed it to diamonds, and I had them strung into a necklace."

"Left it in the *Sturtgart?*"

The man shook himself free from us, clutched his coat together with trembling fingers, and glanced from one to the other of us with wild staring eyes. Then he toppled backwards off the thwart in a breathless faint.

"He's got the plunder with him in his pocket," said Vaughan, thoughtfully. "Nothing like having these things in portable shape. And he's got a thundering sick heart in him, too. I wonder if he's really dead this time?"

I knelt on the grating beside the man, and lifted his head. "He's life in him yet," I said. "Man, ye should be sweeter in your talk. Who are you to cast stones against him?"

"He's a banker, is he?" says Vaughan, thoughtfully. "They don't skip with sixpence ha'penny in their pockets when they do decide to make a bolt for it. I'd like to have a look at that necklace."

He broke off there, and stared at the great waste of heaving water. I busied myself in attending to the banking gentleman. Day was up by this time; the floating anchor of oars broke the combers; and the lifeboat rode drily. The sun was getting into the air, too, and warming us and drying our sodden clothes. But no warmth seemed to stay in the man on the gratings. I'm a fellow that's picked up some scrap of medical knowledge, and it didn't take me long to see that he was dying.

Presently he opened his eyes again, and asked for the second time where he was. His voice was very weak, and I told him as softly as I could; and then, "Mister," said I, "if you've any message to give, you'd better hand it to my keeping. Vaughan and I may get ashore—at least there's a slender chance. But I fancy you won't."

"No," he said feebly. "You're right. My heart's done." And then he broke off again, and shut his eyes, and appeared to think. "Look here," he said, "can I trust you?"

"No," snaps Vaughan.

"Yes," says I. "My father was the most respectable man in Scotland."

"Well, I've got to," says he, with a quivering sort of sigh. He tried to lift a hand, but couldn't. "There's an envelope in

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my breast pocket. I haven't strength left to get it myself. Pull it out for me, will you?"

I found a linen envelope, which the wet had not spoiled.

"The necklace is inside there, and with it the address of my wife. If you'll take it to her she'll reward you."

"For handing on your stolen goods?" says Vaughan.

The man squirmed on the grating. "At least I've given my life for them," said he. "My wife," he said, and raised himself on an elbow. "My wife," he whispered, and his grey face bent slowly back till the apple in his neck stood out like an egg. And then the rolling boat threw him off his balance, and he fell back with a sodden thud on to the grating.

I knelt and looked at him. "He's dead enough this time."

"Dead as Julius Cæsar," says Vaughan. "Open the envelope, Mr. McTodd."

"For why?" says I.

"For why? To see where you've got to take it, to be sure. You can't read the lady's name from the outside, can you?"

"No," said I, "that's right enough." I put my thumb in the flap. The gum was wet, and it pulled open easily enough. And then I lugged out the necklace.

My word, what a sight that was! The stones were as big as Lima beans! I'd never seen such stones; no, not even worn by ladies singing in the halls. The sun caught them, and the flashes they gave out were enough to make me wink.

"Gosh, man," I said, "you were right. It's no' sixpence ha'-penny he was content with stealing. This gaud will be worth all of seven hundred pounds. And I'm a bit of a judge."

"A judge!" shouts Vaughan, "you a judge! You great gumph! Seven hundred pounds! Say seventeen thousand, and you'll be closer the mark. And heaven only knows I can go near the price. I've bought enough of them for one woman and another. If I hadn't, I shouldn't be here. Yes, there's seventeen thousand pounds' worth of gems in your hands this minute if there's a penny's worth. Why, man, that's a necklace fit for a queen."

"Seventeen thousand pounds!" said I. "You don't say!"

"Indeed I do, and I've got first mortgage on it for ten hundred."

"How's that?"

"For salvage."

"Well, I suppose that's right. If it hadn't been for you, the stones would have been on the sea-floor this minute. But what do you suppose the leddy will give me out of it?"

"Half-a-crown and a drink of beer."

"But I'll be wanting more than that."

"Of course you do. Any sensible man would. And I tell you

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how we must manage it, Mac. We must sell it ourselves, if we ever do get ashore—which, of course, is open to doubt—pocket our shares, and send on the balance."

I shivered. "I'd not like to have the handling of a large sum like that, laddie, if it could be avoided. I—I have my weaknesses."

"So have I, my faith, or do you think I'd have come down from what I was to firing on a damned German emigrant boat? And if you want my candid opinion of what will happen, it's here packed small. We shall have difficulty in selling the necklace, because all dealers will take us for thieves, and we shall have to get rid of it on the quiet. We shall get about half value for it, and then we shall start in on a gorgeous spree, and never stop till we've spent the last cent."

"Man," I said with a sigh," I believe you're right."

"I know I am. We're not fit to touch the thing, either of us. And we'd be doing wrong in giving it to the man's wife. It's stolen, and she's no right to it. And, frankly, I don't want to have any further truck with it at all. I've been most kinds of blackguard since I left Oxford, but I've not been the thieving variety up to date, and I don't particularly want to be tempted into it. Look you, Mac, lend me the necklace, and I'll show you a trick of honesty with it."

He took it from my fingers. He swung it to and fro between him and the sun, filling his eyes with the colours of it; and then he heaved it high into the windy air as far as his arm could fling. We never saw the necklace touch the water. A great hill of green leaped up and hid it whilst yet it was in the air.

"Seventeen thousand pounds," I said, "seventeen thousand! Man, it's an awful pity."

He busied himself by getting the lug-sail halliard rove, and the mast stepped.

"Well," I said, "we're honest yet."

"Indifferently so," says he. "Bear a hand, Mac, and ship that steering oar of yours again. The sea's going down, and we must risk it. Anyway, if we stay here we shall starve. I've snugged this lug down to the last reef."

He handed aft the sheet, manned the halliards, and mastheaded the lug. Then he went forward, and with his knife sawed through the rope to which we rode to the sea anchor.

I gave her helm, whaler fashion; the sail slatted and filled and drew: and the lifeboat swung round in a pother of foam. The brown hills of Portugal showed warmly across five miles of tearing water on the starboard hand, but I dared not bring the lifeboat on the wind. With that terrible sea that was still running she would not have lived a minute. Even in turning she had filled

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again very nearly to the thwarts. There was nothing for it except to run, and edge in slowly. And that is what we did.

Vaughan baled. Only once in four wet, boisterous hours did he look up from his work.

"Seventeen blessed thousand pounds!" says he. "Think of it, McTodd. We could have offered much fine incense to the devil with that, my lad."

"Dinna mock," I said, "on this lonely sea. The Almighty's got no one else to listen to out here, and He's giving us both ears."

"You're right," he said, "I won't. I'm feeling damned virtuous just now, and it won't do to spoil the effect. Seventeen thousand quid! Supposing I'd got, say, five thousand as my share. I could have gone back with that, and seen London again, and the girls, and oh lord! oh lord—!" And there he broke off and went on with his baling.

We were drawing nearer all this time to the coastline, for I was edging her in all I dared, and we could see the surf spouting up along the beach in fountains that gleamed in the sunlight. The lifeboat leaped like a live thing amongst the waves, and the dead man stared at me open-eyed from the gratings.

To try to run her through those breakers seemed madness, but to stay at sea meant starvation, not to mention that any moment a wrong move with the steering oar might see us capsized. The tongue was glued in my mouth with thirst, and I could not talk: but I beckoned my wishes to Vaughan, and he nodded assent.

We were only a quarter of a mile then from the beach, and I put the boat squarely for it. Vaughan lay aft and flattened in the sheet, and she slid over the seas like a racing yacht. It made you tingle all over to feel the way she moved. She took the first comber like a jumping horse, and then swirled on in a lake of yeasty broken water. But the crest had filled her to the thwarts, and she had lost her way, and the next roller spun her round like an empty bottle. Vaughan and I jumped for it on either side, like a pair of frogs, and then it was each for himself. We never saw trace of either boat or dead man afterwards.

It was not the first time I've swum in through a bad surf, and I managed it, though it was touch and go, and I landed with the breath nearly knocked out of my body for good and always. But Vaughan was there before me. He'd got a cut over the head from a floating oar, but he didn't seem to mind that. He'd seen a stream trickling down the cliffs beyond the beach, and he was running for that with all the speed that was in him.

I followed more slowly, and put my face in the cool, sweet water, and we drank, both of us, till we were well-nigh fit to burst.

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And then we sat down on the moist green moss beside it.

"It's a merciful escape," said I.

"'Tis," said he. "You've got that envelope with that woman's name in it?"

"I have."

"Then tear the thing up and throw it away."

"What for?"

"Because it can do no good, and it may do harm. You don't want to go and call on her, I suppose, and say you know her husband was a thief, and that he gave you a necklace to carry home, and you haven't got it?"

"I should have no sort of a tale to tell."

"Do the kindest thing, Mac, and let him slip out of memory. It's a chance we bad eggs don't always get. Here am I, now. My people will find out that I shipped in the *Sturtgart*, and that she's foundered. At home I've been a nuisance to myself, and a terror to my friends. But I've got here a chance to wipe the old slate and start afresh. You only know me under an assumed name, so you couldn't give me away if you wished. But I suppose you'll go and give evidence before some sort of Enquiry Board, and I do ask you as a favour to say you are the only one saved. Then I can't be traced."

"But, man," said I, "that would be lying."

"In a good cause, Mac."

"I'll save my conscience," said I, dryly enough. "I'll not go near any Courts of Enquiry at all. I'd some difficulty with the police in Liverpool a few weeks back, and it would suit me well if I wasn't heard of either for a while. So, if it's all the same to you, laddie, we'll just keep dark, and let it be thought that the old *Sturtgart* carried all hands with her when she took her fearsome dive."

We shook hands on that, and went into the country at the back and made a meal off prickly pears. And then, after a sleep, we parted, and I've never seen or heard of Vaughan since. For myself, I got employment during the next few weeks in a beet-sugar mill. And when next I found myself in a seaport town, the sinking of the *Sturtgart* had lost its freshness.

* * *

## *CLOSED SEASON*

Above the door of a local church is pinned an engraved message which reads: *This is the gateway to Heaven.* Below the engraving hangs a carefully printed sign: *Closed during July and August.*

*Presbyterian Life*

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# FOX HUNT

**Her eyes burned red like a fox's, and her hair was a copper cloud**

## by WILLIAM FAULKNER

AN hour before daylight three stable boys approached the stable, carrying a lantern. While one of them unlocked and slid back the door, the bearer of the lantern lifted it and turned the beam into the darkness where a clump of pines shouldered into the paddock fence.

Out of this darkness three sets of big, spaced eyes glared mildly for a moment, then vanished. "Heyo," the bearer called. No sound came from the darkness; the mule eyes did not show again. The stable boys entered the barn, murmuring among themselves; a burst of laughter floated back, mellow and meaningless and idiotic.

"How many d'you see?" the second boy asked.

"Just three mules," the lantern bearer said. "There's more than that, though."

Inside the stalls horses began to whinny and stamp; over the whitewashed doors the high, long muzzles moved with tossing, eager shadows; the atmosphere was rich, warm, ammoniac, and clean. The boys began to put feed into the patent troughs, moving from stall to stall with the clever agility of monkeys, with short, mellow, meaningless cries, "Hoo. Stand over thar. Gotta ketch dat fox today."

In the darkness where the clump of pines shouldered the paddock fence, eleven men squatted, surrounded by eleven tethered mules. The chill of the autumn morning hung about them, and the men squatted shapeless and motionless, not talking. From the stable came the sound of horses eating; just before day broke a twelfth man came up on a mule and dismounted and squatted among the others without a word. When the sun came up and the first saddled horse was led out of the stable, the grass was rimed with frost, and the roof of the stable looked like silver in the silver light.

It could be seen then that the squatting men were all white men and all in overalls, and that all of the mules save two were saddleless. They had gathered from the one-roomed clay-floored cabins about the pine land, and they squatted, decorous, grave, and

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patient among their gaunt and mud-caked and burr-starred mules, watching the saddled horses, the fine horses with pedigrees longer than Harrison Blair's, who owned them, being led one by one from a steam-heated stable and up the gravel path to the house, before which a pack of hounds already moiled and yapped, and on the verandah of which men and women in boots and pink coats were beginning to gather.

Slovenly, unhurried, outwardly scarcely attentive, the men in overalls watched Harrison Blair, who owned the house and the dogs, and some of the guests, too, perhaps, mount a big, vicious looking black horse; then they watched another man lift Blair's wife on to a chestnut mare and then mount a bay horse in his turn.

One of the men in overalls was chewing tobacco slowly. Beside him stood a youth, in overalls, too, gangling, with a soft stubble of beard. They spoke without moving their heads, hardly moving their lips.

"That the one?" the youth said.

The older man spat deliberately, without moving. "The one what?"

"His wife's one."

The old man contemplated the group before the house. He appeared to, that is. His gaze was inscrutable, blank, without haste; none could have said if he were watching the man and woman or not. "Don't believe anything you hear, and not more than half you see," he said.

"What do you think about it?" the youth said.

The other spat deliberately and carefully. "Nothing," he said. "She ain't my wife." Then he said, without raising his voice and without any change in inflection, though he was now speaking to the head groom who had come up beside him. "That fellow don't own no horse."

"Which fellow don't?" the groom asked. The first speaker indicated the man who was holding the bay horse against the chestnut mare's flank. "Oh," the groom said. "Mr. Gawtrey. Pity the horse, if he did."

"Pity the horse that *he* owns, too," the old man said. "Pity anything he owns."

"You mean Mr. Harrison?" the groom asked. "Does these here horses look like they needs your pity?"

"Sure," the old man agreed, ironically. "I reckon that black horse does like to be rode like he rides it."

"Don't you be pitying no Blair horses," the groom said.

The old man appeared to contemplate the blooded horses that lived in a steam-heated house, the people in boots and pink coats, and Blair himself sitting the plunging black. "He's been trying to

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catch that vixen for three years now," he said. "Whyn't he let one of you boys shoot it or poison it?"

"Shoot it or poison it?" the groom said. "Don't you know that ain't no way to catch a fox?"

"Why ain't it?"

"It ain't sportin'," the groom said. "You ought to been around long enough by now to know how gentlemen folks hunts."

"Oh, sure," the old man said. He was not looking at the groom. "Wonder how a man rich as folks say he is"—again he spat, in the action something meagre but without intended insult, as if he might have been indicating Blair with a jerked finger—"is got time to hate one little old fox bitch like that. Don't even want the dogs to catch it. Trying to outride the dogs so he can kill it with a stick like it was a snake. Coming all the way down here every year, bringing all them folks and boarding them and sleeping them, to run one little old mangy fox that I could catch in one night with an axe and a good dog."

"That's something else about gentlemen folks you won't never know," the groom said.

"No need to know," the old man said.

The ridge was a long shoal of pine and sand, broken along one flank into gaps through which could be seen a fallow ricefield almost a mile wide which ended against a briar-choked dyke. The two men in overalls, the older man and the youth, sat their mules in one of these gaps, looking down into the field. Farther down on the ridge, about half a mile away, the dogs were at fault; the yapping cries came back up the ridge, baffled, ringing, profoundly urgent.

"You'd think he would learn in three years that he ain't going to catch any Cal-lina fox with them Yankee city dogs," the youth said.

"He knows it," the other said. "He don't want them dogs to catch it. He can't even bear for a blooded dog to go in front of him."

"They're in front of him now, though."

"You think so?"

"Where is he, then?"

"I don't know. But I know that he ain't no closer to them fool dogs right now than that fox is. Wherever that fox is squatting right now, laughing at them dogs, that's where he is heading for."

"You mean to tell me that any man in the world can smell out a fox where even a city dog can't untangle it?"

"Them dogs yonder can't smell out a straight track because they don't hate that fox. A good fox dog is a good dog on the scent

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because he hates the fox, not because he's got an extra good nose. It ain't his nose that leads him; it's his hating. And that's why when I see which-a-way that fellow's riding, I'll tell you which-a-way that fox has run."

The youth made a sound in his throat and nostrils. "A growed-up man. Hating a durn little old mangy fox. I be durn if it don't take a lot of trouble to be rich. I be durn if it don't."

They looked down into the field. From farther on down the ridge the eager, baffled yapping of the dogs came. The last rider in boots and pink had ridden up and passed them and gone on, and the two men sat their mules in the profound and winy sunny silence, listening, with expressions identical and bleak and sardonic on their gaunt, yellow faces. Then the youth turned on his mule and looked back up the ridge in the direction from which the race had come.

At that moment the older man turned also and, motionless, making no sound, they watched two more riders come up and pass. They passed like one beast, like a double or hermaphroditic centaur with two heads and eight legs.

The woman carried her hat in her hand; in the slanting sun the fine, soft cloud of her unbobbed hair gleamed like the chestnut's flank, like soft fire, the mass of it appearing to be too heavy for her slender neck. She was sitting the mare with a kind of delicate awkwardness, leaning forward as though she were trying to outpace it, with a quality about her of flight within flight, separate and distinct from the speed of the mare.

The man was holding the bay horse against the mare's flank at full gallop. His hand lay on the woman's hand which held the reins, and he was slowly but steadily drawing both horses back, slowing them. He was leaning towards the woman; the two men on the mules could see his profile stoop past with a cold and ruthless quality like that of a stooping hawk; they could see that he was talking to the woman.

They passed so, with that semblance of a thrush and a hawk in terrific immobility in mid-air, with an apparitionlike suddenness, a soft rush of hooves in the sere needles, and were gone, the man stooping, the woman leaning forward like a tableau of flight and pursuit on a lightning bolt.

Then they were gone. After a while the youth said, "That one don't seem to need no help neither." His head was still turned after the vanished riders. The other man said nothing. "Yes, sir," the youth said. "Just like a fox. I be durn if I see how that skinny neck of hers . . . Like you look at a fox and you wonder how a durn little critter like it can carry all that brush. And I once heard him say"—he in turn indicated that it was the rider of the black

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horse and not the bay of whom he spoke—" something to her that a man don't say to a woman in comp'ny, and her eyes turned red like a fox's and then brown again like a fox."

The other did not answer. The youth looked at him.

The older man was leaning a little forward on his mule, looking down into the field. " What's that down there ? " he said. The youth looked also. From the edge of the woods beneath them came a mould-ruffled rush of hooves and then a crash of undergrowth ; then they saw, emerging from the woods at full gallop, Blair on the black horse.

He entered the ricefield at a dead run and began to cross it with the unfaltering and undeviating speed of a crow's flight, following a course as straight as a surveyor's line towards the dyke which bounded the field at its other side.

" What did I tell you ? " the older man said. " That fox is hid yonder on that ditch-bank. Well, it ain't the first time they've seen one another eye to eye. He got close enough to it once two years ago to throw that 'ere leather riding-switch at it."

" Sure," the youth said. " These gentlemen folks don't need no dogs."

In the faint, sandy road which followed the crest of the ridge, and opposite another gap in the trees through which could be seen a pie-shaped segment of the ricefield, and some distance in the rear of the hunt, stood a station wagon with a light truck body. At the wheel sat a uniformed chauffeur ; beside him, hunched into a black overcoat, was a man in a derby hat.

He had a smooth, flaccid, indoors face and he was smoking a cigarette : a face sardonic and composed, yet at the moment a little wearily savage, like that of an indoors bred and inclined man, subject to and helpless before some natural inclemency like cold or wet. He was talking.

" Sure. This all belongs to her, house and all. His old man owned it before they moved to New York and got rich, and Blair was born here. He bought it back and give it to her for a wedding present. All he kept was this what-ever-it-is he's trying to catch."

" And he can't catch that," the chauffeur said.

" Coming down here every year and staying two months, without nothing to see and nowhere to go," went on the other man, unheeding. " If he wants to live outside of civilization for two months every year, why don't he go and spend a while on Lenox Avenue ? You don't have to drink the gin. But he's got to buy this place and give it to her for a present because she is one of these Southerners and she might get homesick or something. Well,

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that's all right, I guess. But Fourteenth Street is far enough South for me. But still, if it ain't this, it might be Europe or somewhere. I don't know which is worse."

"Why did he marry her, anyways?" the chauffeur said.

"You want to know why he married her? It wasn't for money, even if they did have a pot full of it, from all this Oklahoma Indian oil. . . ."

"Indian oil?"

"Sure. The government give this Oklahoma to the Indians because nobody else would have it, and when the first Indian got there and seen it and dropped dead and they tried to bury him, when they stuck the shovel into the ground the oil blowed the shovel out of the fellow's hand, and so the white folks come.

"They would come up with a fine new car with the man from the garage driving it and they go to an Indian and say, 'Well, John, how much rotten water you catchum your front yard?' and the Indian would say, three wells or thirteen wells or whatever it is, and the white man would say, 'That's too bad. The way the White Father put the bee on you boys, it's too bad. Well, never mind. You see this fine new car here? Well, I'm going to give it to you so you can load up your folks and go on to where the water don't come out of the ground rotten and where the White Father can't put the bee on you no more.'

"So the Indian would load his family into the car, and the garage man would head the car west, I guess, and show the Indian where the gasoline lever was and hop off and snag the first car back to town. See?"

"Oh," the chauffeur said.

"Sure. So here we was in England one time, minding our own business, when here this old dame and her red-headed gal come piling over from Europe or somewheres. The gal was going to some big high school there, an here it ain't a week before Blair says, 'Well, Ernie, we're going to get married.' What the hell do you think of that? And him a fellow that hadn't done nothing all his life but dodge skirts so he could drink all night and try to ride a horse to death all day, getting married in less than a week. But soon as I see this old dame, I know which one of her and her husband it was that had took them oil wells off the Indians."

"She must have been smart, to put it over on Blair at all, let alone that quick," the chauffeur said. "Tough on her, though. I'd hate for my daughter to belong to him. Not saying nothing against him, of course."

"I'd hate for my dog to belong to him. I seen him kill a dog once because it wouldn't mind him. Killed it with a walking stick, with one lick. 'Here,' he says, 'send Andrews to haul this away.'"

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"I don't see how you put up with him," the chauffeur said. "Driving his cars, that's one thing. But you, in the house with him day and night . . ."

The other smiled grimly.

"We settled that," he said. "He used to have it in for me when he was drinking. One day he put his hand on me and I told him I would kill him. 'When?' he says. 'When you get back from the hospital?' 'Maybe before I go there,' I says. I had my hand in my pocket. 'I believe you would,' he says. So we get along now. I put the gun away and he don't lay into me any more and we get along."

"Why didn't you quit?"

"I don't know. It's a good job, even if we do stay all over the place all the time. Lordy! half the time I don't know if the next train goes to Ty Juana or Italy; I don't know half the time where I'm at or if I can read the newspaper next morning even. Still I like him and he likes me."

"Maybe he quit riding you because he had something else to ride," the chauffeur said.

"Maybe so. Anyways, when they married, she hadn't never been on a horse before in all her life until he bought this chestnut horse for her to match her hair. We went all the way to Kentucky for it, and he come back in the same car with it. I wouldn't do it; I says I would do anything in reason for him, but I wasn't going to ride in no horse pullman with it empty, let alone with a horse already in it. So I come back by myself.

"He didn't tell her about the horse until it was in the stable. 'But I don't want to ride,' she says.

"'My wife will be expected to ride,' he says. 'You are not in Oklahoma now.'

"'But I can't ride,' she says.

"'You can at least sit on top of the horse so they will think you can ride on it,' he says.

"So she goes to Callaghan, riding them practice nags of his with the children and the chorus girls that have took up horse riding to get ready to get drafted from the bushes out in Brooklyn or New Jersey to the Drive or Central Park. And her hating a horse like it was a snake ever since one day when she was a kid and gets sick on a merry-go-round."

"How did you know all this?" the chauffeur said.

"I was there. We used to stop there now and then in the afternoon to see how she was coming on the horse. Sometimes she wouldn't even know we was there, or maybe she did. Anyways, here she would go, round and round among the children and one or two head of Zigfield's prize stock, passing us and not looking

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at us, and Blair standing there with that black face of his like a subway tunnel, like he knew all the time she couldn't ride no horse even on a merry-go-round and like he didn't care if she learned or not, just so he could watch her trying and not doing it.

"So at last even Callaghan come to him and told him it wasn't no use. 'Very well,' Blair says. 'Callaghan says you may be able to sit on the top of a painted horse, so I will buy you a horse out of a roundabout and nail him to the front porch, and you can at least be sitting on top of it when we come up.'

"'I'll go back to momma,' she says.

"'I wish you would,' Blair says. 'My old man tried all his life to make a banker out of me, but your old woman's done it in two months.'"

"I thought you said they had money of their own," the chauffeur said. "Why didn't she spend some of that?"

"I don't know. Maybe there wasn't no exchange for Indian money in New York. Anyways, she was always at him. Sometimes she wouldn't even wait until I could get Blair under a shower and a jolt into him before breakfast, to make the touch. So the gal goes to the old dame—she lives on Park Avenue—and she . . ."

"Was you there, too?" the chauffeur said.

"Cried . . . What? Oh. This was a maid, a little Irish kid named Burke; me and her used to go out now and then. She was the one told me about this other fellow, this Yale College boy, this Indian sweetheart."

"Indian sweetheart?"

"They went to the same ward school out at Oklahoma or something. Swapped Masonic rings or something before the gal's old man found three oil wells in the henhouse and dropped dead and the old dame took the gal off to Europe to go to the big high school there. So this boy goes to Yale college and last year what does he do but marry a gal out of a circus that happened to be in town.

"Well, when she finds that Callaghan has give her up, she goes to her old woman in Park Avenue. She cries. 'I begin to think that maybe I won't look funny to his friends, and then he comes there and watches me. He don't say nothing,' she says, 'he just stands there and watches me.'

"'After all I've done for you,' the old dame says. 'Got you a husband that any gal in New York would have snapped up. When all he asks is that you learn to sit on top of a horse and not shame him before his swell friends. After all I done for you,' the old dame says.

"'I didn't,' she says. 'I didn't want to marry him.'

"'Who did you want to marry?' the old dame says.

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" ' I didn't want to marry nobody,' the gal says.

" So now the old dame digs up about this boy, this Allen boy that the gal . . ."

" I thought you said his name was Yale," the chauffeur said.

" No. Yale is where he went to this college. Don't you read no papers ? "

" Not often," the chauffeur said. " I don't care nothing about politics."

"All right. So this Yale boy's poppa had found an oil well, too, and he was lousy with it, too ; and, besides, the old dame was mad because Blair wouldn't let her live in the house with them and wouldn't take her nowheres where we went. So the old dame give them all three—her and Blair and this college boy—the devil until the gal jumps up and says she will ride on a horse or bust, and Blair told her to go on and bust if she aimed to ride on this chestnut horse we brought all the way back from Kentucky. ' I don't aim for you to ruin this good horse,' Blair says. " You'll ride on the horse I tell you to ride on.'

" So then she would slip out the back way and go off and try to ride this horse, this good one from Kentucky, to learn how first and then surprise him. The first time didn't hurt her, but the second time it broke her collarbone, and she was scared how Blair would find it out until she discovered how he had knew it all the time that she was riding on it. So when we come down here for the first time that year and Blair started chasing this lyron or whatever it—"

" Fox," the chauffeur said.

" All right. That's what I said. So when—"

" You said lyron," the chauffeur said.

" All right. Leave it be a lyron. Anyways, she would ride on this chestnut horse, trying to keep up, and Blair already outrun the dogs and all, like this time two years ago when he run off from the dogs and got close enough to this lyron to hit it with his riding whip—"

" You mean fox," the chauffeur said. " A fox, not a lyron. Say . . ." The other man, the valet, secretary, whatever he might have been, was lighting another cigarette, crouched into his upturned collar, the derby slanted down upon his face.

" Say what ? " he asked.

" I was wondering," the chauffeur said.

" Wondering what ? "

" If it's really as hard for him to ride off and leave her as he thinks it is. To keep from seeing her ruining this good Kentucky horse. If he has to ride as fast to do it as he thinks he does."

" What about that ? "

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" Maybe he don't have to ride as fast this year as he did last year, to run off from her. What do you think about it ? "

" Oh. You mean Gawtrey."

" That his name ? Gawtrey ? "

" That's it. Steve Gawtrey."

" What about *him ?* "

" He's all right. He'll eat your grub and drink your liquor and fool your women and let you say when."

" Well, what about that ? "

" Nothing. I said he was all right. He's fine by me."

" How by you ? "

" Just fine, see ? I done him a little favour once, and he done me a little favour, see ? "

" Oh," the chauffeur said. He did not look at the other. " How long has she known him ? "

" Six months and maybe a week. We was up in Connecticut and he was there. He hates a horse about as much as she does, but me and Callaghan are all right, too ; I done Callaghan a little favour once, too, so about a week after we came back from Connecticut, I have Callaghan come in and tell Blair about a special bred horse, without telling Blair who owned it.

" So that night I says to Blair, ' I hear Mr. Van Dyming wants to buy this horse from Mr. Gawtrey, too.' ' Buy what horse ? ' Blair says. ' I don't know,' I says. ' One horse looks just like another to me as long as it stays out doors where it belongs,' I says.

" Blair says, ' What horse are you talking about ? ' ' This horse Callaghan was telling you about,' I says. Then he begun to curse Callaghan. ' He told me he would get that horse for me,' he says. ' It don't belong to Callaghan,' I says, ' it's Mr. Gawtrey's horse.' So here it's two nights later when he brings Gawtrey home to dinner with him. That night I says, ' I guess you bought that horse.' He had been drinking and he cursed Gawtrey and Callaghan too. ' He won't sell it,' he says. ' You want to keep after him,' I says. ' A man will sell anything.' ' How keep after him, when he won't listen to a price ?' he says. ' Leave your wife do the talking,' I says. ' He'll listen to her.' That was when he hit me . . ."

" I thought you said he just put his hand on you," the chauffeur said.

" I mean he just kind of flung out his hand when he was talking, and I happened to kind of turn my face towards him at the same time. He never aimed to hit me because he knowed I would have shot him. I told him so. I had the gun in my hand, inside my coat, all the while.

" So after that Gawtrey would come back maybe once a week because I told him I had a good job and I didn't aim to have to

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shoot myself out of it for no man except myself maybe. He come once a week. The first time she wouldn't let him in. Then one day I am reading the paper—you ought to read a paper now and then. You ought to keep up with the day of the week, at least—and I read where this Yale Allen boy has run off with a circus gal and they had fired him off the college. I guess that made him mad, after he had done jumped the college anyways.

"So I cut it out, and this Burke kid—me and her was all right, too—she puts it on the breakfast tray that A.M. And that afternoon, when Gawtrey happens to come back, she lets him in, and this Burke kid happens to walk into the room sudden with something—I don't know what it was—and here is Gawtrey and her like a fade-out in the pictures."

"So Blair got his horse," the chauffeur said.

"What horse?"

"The horse Gawtrey wouldn't sell him."

"How could he, when Gawtrey never owned no horse no more than I do, unless it's maybe some old nag still finishing last year's Selling Plate at Pimlico? Besides, Gawtrey don't owe Blair no horse yet."

"Not yet?"

"She don't like him, see. The first time he come to the house alone she wouldn't let him into the front door. And the next time, too, she wouldn't if this Burke kid hadn't happened to've left that piece out of the papers about this college boy on the breakfast tray. And the time after that when he come, she wouldn't let him in again; it was like he might have been a horse maybe, or even a dog, because she hated a dog worse than she did a horse even, even if she didn't have to try to ride on no dog. If it had have been a dog, Blair wouldn't have never got her to even try to ride on it. So I had to go out and steam Callaghan up again until it got to where I wasn't no more than one of these Russian droshkies or something."

"A Russian what?"

"One of these fellows that can't call their soul their own. Every time I would leave the house I would have to meet Gawtrey somewhere and then go to see Callaghan and soap him down, because he is one of these boys with ideas, see?"

"What kind of ideas?"

"Just ideas. Out of the Sunday School paper. About how this wasn't right because he liked her and felt sorry for her and so he wanted to tell Blair he had been lying and that Gawtrey hadn't never owned a horse. The kind of fellow that won't take a penny when it's throwed right in his face, he ain't never as big a fool to nobody as he is to the man that can have some sense about things and keep all these golden rules in the Sunday School paper

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where they belong. If the Lord didn't want a man to cut his own grass, why did He put Sunday on Sunday like He did? Tell me that."

"I guess you're right," the chauffeur said.

"Sure I'm right. So I told Callaghan that Blair would cut his throat and mine both for a Rockefeller quarter, same as any sensible man, and I asked him if he thought gals had all give out with Blair's wife; if she was going to be the last one they made."

"So he don't . . ." the chauffeur began. He ceased; then he said, "Look there."

The other man looked. Through the gap in the trees, in the centre of the segment of visible ricefield, they could see a tiny pink-and-black dot. It was almost a mile away; it did not appear to be moving fast.

"What's that?" the other asked. "The fox?"

"It's Blair," the chauffeur said. "He's going fast. I wonder where the others are." They watched the pink-and-black dot go on and disappear.

"They've went back home if they had any sense," the other said. "So we might as well go back, too."

"I guess so," the chauffeur said. "So Gawtrey don't owe Blair no horse yet."

"Not yet. She still don't like him. She wouldn't let him in the house again after that day, and this Burke kid says she come back from a party one night because Gawtrey was there. And if it hadn't been for me, Gawtrey wouldn't have got invited down here, because she told Blair that if he come, she wouldn't come. So I had to work on Callaghan again to come in once a day and steam Blair up again about the horse to get Gawtrey invited."

The chauffeur got out of the car and went round to the crank. The other man lighted a cigarette. "But Blair ain't got his horse yet. You take a woman with long hair like she's got, long as she keeps her hair up, it's all right. But once you catch her with her hair down, it's just too bad."

The chauffeur cranked the engine. Then he paused, stooped, his head turned. "Listen," he said.

"What?"

"That horn." The silver sound came again, faint, distant, prolonged.

"What's that?" the other asked. "Do they have to keep soldiers here?"

"It's the horn they blow," the chauffeur said. "It means they have caught that fox."

"Fine!" the other said. "Maybe we will go back to town tomorrow."

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The two men on the mules recrossed the ricefield and mounted the ridge into the pines.

"Well," the youth said. "I reckon he's satisfied now."

"You reckon he is?" the other said. He rode a little in front of the youth. He did not turn his head when he spoke.

"He's run that fox three years," the youth said. "And now he's killed it. Why shouldn't he be satisfied?"

The older man did not look back. He slouched on his gaunt, shabby mule, his overalled legs dangling. He spoke in a tone of lazy and ironical contempt. "I reckon that's something about gentlemen folks you won't never know."

"Fox is fox, to me," the youth said. "Can't eat it. Might as well poison it and save them horses."

"Sure," the other said. "That's something else about them you won't never understand."

They mounted the ridge, and turned into the faint, sandy road. "Well," the older man said, "gentlemen or not, I reckon that's the only fox in Cal-lina that ever got itself killed that-a-way. Maybe that's the way they kills a fox up north."

"Then I be durn if I ain't glad I don't live up there," the youth said.

"I reckon so," the other said. "I done got along pretty well here for some time, myself."

"I'd like to see it once, though," the youth said.

"I don't reckon I would," the other said, "if living there makes a man go to all this trouble to kill a fox."

They were riding up the ridge, among the pines, the holly bushes, the huckleberries and the briars. Suddenly the older man checked his mule, extending his hand backward.

"What?" the youth said. "What is it?"

The pause was hardly a pause; again the older man rode on; softly he began to whistle, the tone carrying and clear, though not loud, the tune lugubrious and hymnlike. From beyond the bushes which bordered the path just ahead of them came the snort of a horse.

"Who is it?" the youth asked. The other made no reply. The two mules went on in single file. Then the youth said quietly, "She's got her hair down. It looks like the sun on a spring branch." The mules paced on in the light, whispering soil, their ears bobbing, the two men sitting loose, with dangling, stirrupless feet.

The woman sat the mare, her hair a bright cloud, a copper cascade in the sun, about her shoulders, her arms lifted and her hands busy in it. The man sat the bay horse a short distance away. He was lighting a cigarette.

The two mules came up, tireless, shambling, with drooping

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heads and nodding ears. The youth looked at the woman with a stare at once bold and covert; the older man did not cease his mellow, slow, tuneless whistling; he did not appear to look at them at all. He appeared to be about to ride past without a sign when the man on the bay spoke to him.

"They caught it, did they?" he asked. "We heard the horn."

"Yaas," the man in overalls said, in a dry, drawling tone. "Yaas. It got caught. 'T warnt nothing else it could do but get caught."

The youth watched the woman looking at the older man, her hands arrested for an instant in her hair.

"What do you mean?" the man on the bay asked.

"He rode it down on that black horse," the man in overalls said.

"You mean, there were no dogs there?"

"I reckon not," the other said. "Them dogs never had no black horses to ride."

The two mules had halted; the older man turned to face the man on the bay, his face hidden beneath his shapeless hat. "It crossed the old field and dropped over that ditch-bank and hid, allowing for him to jump the ditch, and then it aimed to double back, I reckon. I reckon it wasn't scared of the dogs. I reckon it had fooled them so much it wasn't worried about them. It was him what worried it. I reckon he and it knowed one another after these three years same as you maybe knowed your ma or your wife maybe, only you ain't never been married none to speak of.

"Anyway it was on the ditch-bank, and he knowed it was there, and he cut straight across the field without giving it no spell to breathe in. I reckon, maybe, you all seen him riding straight across that field like he could see like a hawk and smell like a dog. And the fox was there, where it had done fooled the dogs. But it never had no spell to breathe in, and when it had to run again and dropped over the ditch-bank, it dropped into the briars, I reckon, and it was too tired to get out and run. And he come up and jumped that ditch, just like that fox aimed for him to. Only the fox was still in the briars, and while he was going through the air he looked down and seen the fox and he clumb off the horse while it was jumping and dropped feet first into the briars like the fox done.

"Maybe it dodged some then; I don't know. He says it just swirled and jumped at his face and he knocked it down with his foot and trampled it dead with his boot-heels. The dogs hadn't got there then. But it so happened he never needed them."

He ceased talking and sat for a moment longer, slovenly inert upon the shabby, patient mule, his face shadowed beneath his hat. "Well," he said, "I reckon I'll get on. I ain't had ne'er a bite

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of breakfast yet. I'll bid you all good morning." He put his mule into motion, the second mule following. He did not look back.

But the youth did. He looked back at the man on the bay horse, the cigarette burning in his hand, the plume of smoke faint and windless in the sunny silence, and at the woman on the chestnut, her arms lifted and her hands busy in her bright, cloudy hair; projecting, trying to project himself, after the way of the young, towards that remote and inaccessible she, trying to encompass the vain and inarticulate instant of division and despair which, being young, was very like rage: rage at the lost woman, despair of the man in whose shape there walked the tragic and inescapable earth, her ruin. "She was crying," he said, then he began to curse, savagely, without point or subject.

"Come on," the older man said. He did not look back. "I reckon them hunt breakfast hot-cakes will be about ready time we get home."

* * *

## *WHITE WATCH*

*Apple boughs lie in the eaves,*
*On windless nights the apple leaves*
*Chirp against the window panes*
*Slightly as a mist that rains.*
*Apple boughs lie on the roof;*
*Feet of more than one dove*
*(Doves asleep) stir at nights*
*Among the leaves as dark alights.*
*Summer nights, ah, summer nights*
*When she set the casement wide*
*With fingers like the leaves outside—*
*Like a moonbeam her white arm*
*Reached to winy apples, warm*
*As her bed already cooling;*
*While all the time she heard the lulling*
*Of the river sinking by,*
*Saw London's light pulse up the sky.*

GORDON BOTTOMLEY, 1874-1948

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# LEAST SAID . . .

**I have been breaking silence these twenty three years and have hardly made a rent in it . . .**

H. D. THOREAU, *Journal, February*, 1841

*The Magpie :* Cacacacacacaca.
*The Frog :* What's he talking about ?
*The Magpie :* I'm not talking, I'm singing !
*The Frog :* Couac !
*The Mole :* Be quiet up there. One can't hear oneself working.

JULES RENARD, *Hunting with the Fox*,
*translated by* T. W. Earp and G. W. Stonier

## *Largesse*

*Why should I spare words ? They cost nothing.*

SENECA, first century A.D., *in a letter*

## *Full Circle*

A hunter goes into the bush. He finds an old human skull. The hunter says : " What brought you here ? " The skull answers : " Talking brought me here." The hunter runs off. He runs to the king. He tells the king : " I found a dry human skull in the bush. It asks you how its father and mother are."

The king says : " Never since my mother bore me have I heard that a dead skull can speak." The king summons the Alkali, the Saba, and the Degi and asks them if they have ever heard the like. None of the wise men has heard the like and they decide to send a guard out with the hunter into the bush to find out if his story is true and, if so, to learn the reason for it. The guard accompany the hunter into the bush with the order to kill him on the spot should he have lied.

The guard and the hunter come to the skull. The hunter addresses the skull : " Skull, speak." The skull is silent. The hunter asks as before : " What brought you here ? " The skull does not answer. The whole day long the hunter begs the skull to speak, but it does not answer. In the evening the guard tells the hunter to make the skull speak, and when he cannot they kill him in accordance with the king's command.

When the guard are gone the skull opens its jaws and asks the

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dead hunter's head: "What brought you here?" The dead hunter's head replies: "Talking brought me here!"

*Nupe Folk Tale told by* LEO FROBENIUS *and* DOUGLAS C. FOX, *in African Genesis*

## *Windfall*

*Never seek to tell thy love,*
*Love that never told can be;*
*For the gentle wind doth move*
*Silently, invisibly.*

*I told my love, I told my love,*
*I told her all my heart,*
*Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears.*
*Ah! she did depart!*

*Soon after she was gone from me,*
*A traveller came by,*
*Silently, invisibly:*
*He took her with a sigh.*

WILLIAM BLAKE, 1757-1827

## *Will You, by G—!*

. . . the eternal Bavard I told you of, who, at twelve o'clock at night, said he would divide what he had to say upon the subject into four heads, and speak largely to each; when his guests, one of whom was an intimate friend of mine, jumped up,—"Will you, by G—!" took away the candles, and left him in the dark.

THE REV. DR. JOHN WARNER, *in a letter, December 20th*, 1778

## *Westminster Chimes*

*Thomas Chaloner . . . was a well-bred gentleman, and of very good naturall parts, and of an agreable humour . . . He had a trick sometimes to goe into Westminster hall in a morning in Terme time, and tell some strange story (sham), and would come thither again about 11 or 12 to have the pleasure to heare how it spred; and sometimes it would be altered, with additions, he could scarce knowe it to be his owne . . .*

JOHN AUBREY, 1626–1697, *Brief Lives*

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## *The Willing Victim—*

I like a man who talks me to death, provided he is amusing; it saves so much trouble.

MRS. P. B. SHELLEY, 1797–1851,
*in a letter to Abraham Hayward*

## *—And The Lasting Reward*

*" You are old," said the youth, " and your jaws are too weak*
*For anything tougher than suet ;*
*Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak—*
*Pray, how did you manage to do it ? "*

*" In my youth," said his father, " I took to the law,*
*And argued each case with my wife :*
*And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,*
*Has lasted the rest of my life."*

LEWIS CARROLL, 1832–1898, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

## *Least Said—*

She sprang away and ran around and around the desks and benches, with Tom after her, and took refuge in a corner at last, with her little white apron to her face. Tom clasped her about her neck and pleaded.

" Now, Becky, it's all over—all over but the kiss . . . Please, Becky." And he tugged at the apron and the hands.

By-and-by she gave up and let her hands drop; her face, all glowing with the struggle, came up and submitted. Tom kissed the red lips and said :

" Now it's all done, Becky. And always after this, you know, you ain't ever to love anybody but me . . . And always, coming to school, or when we're going home, you're to walk with me, when there ain't anybody looking—and you choose me and I choose you at parties, because that's the way you do when you're engaged."

" It's so nice. I never heard of it before."

" Oh, it's ever so jolly ! Why me and Amy Lawrence—"

The big eyes told Tom his blunder . . .

MARK TWAIN, 1835–1910, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

## *—Soonest Mended*

*I held my tongue, and spake nothing : I kept silence, yea, even from good words ; but it was pain and grief to me . . .*
*Psalm Thirty Nine*

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# THE SWAN AND EDGAR

## A Saxon legend compiled from the most original sources

### by ALAN IVIMEY

IN the year when the Danes burned Stamford, and a great star was seen to fall into the Humber, and wolves came at Christmas time and carried off the holy Abbot of Peterborough, and even ate him, slightly; in this same year, the King of Wessex bethrothed his only son, Edgar, to the Princess of Mercia.

On receiving these heavy tidings among all the thanes assembled in the royal Hall, which was filled with the noise of much rejoicing, the young prince excused himself and went out across the meads to reflect upon his fate, and the rather less unhappy one of the holy Abbot of Peterborough. For it is well known that princes, please themselves how they may in the mere matter of love, must marry as their elders decide. And as these elders are usually beyond all hope of enjoying such things themselves, delight has no place in their decisions.

Thus, although the King, his father, had announced very jovially the fate of his son and the hope of his kingdom, yet everyone knew that the Princess of Mercia was two yards tall and had teeth like a horse. And so Edgar had heard mockery under the cheers and the enormous quantity of ale and, after a formal draught or two had excused himself, as though in modesty, and walked out into the winter morning.

He went until he came beside the river Thames, which is young and slim in these parts, where there was no noise at all except the soft hissing of the wind through the brown tatters of the reeds. And while he thought of his fate, and of his own true Love whom they would probably never let him see again, his fingers suddenly felt a piece of bread which he must have picked absently from the royal table as he heard the laughter of the thanes. With a flick of the hand he gave the bread to the river which gently bore it along until a swan, of more than usual beauty and pure plumage, urged herself from a little, hidden bay among the reeds and took the good bread, waggling it in the wet with golden beak and arched, intent neck.

Edgar thought to himself, Even this idle bread is not wasted,

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and yet I must give my kisses to this great mare of Mercia, and exchange ecstasy for duty. But the King's son must do that.

And he began to think of his young Love; her skin as white as thorn flowers, her hair as black as their branches, and whose kissing was sweet and sharp as the small strawberries which hide in summer woods. Three days since they had sent her away to be shut up in a great manor house with one of her aunts, at Wantage; and to make sure that she should no more even hope for Edgar or he for her, either, she was to be betrothed to a thane called Egelric, with an enormous red beard.

So they had said farewell to each other, secretly and all too shortly, clinging together despairingly and unable to keep from tears, seeing that each was everything that the other could well like. But a prince had to do his duty, even when it was to the Princess of Mercia.

As this was passing in his thoughts, Edgar saw that the swan did not eat the bread but swam with it down the stream. Wishing to be as far from his father's Hall as possible, he followed along the bank until he saw the great bird climb out, in the painful manner of swans, and sway with inturned black webs towards a clump of willows round a little flooded hollow, not far from the river's edge. And there, on this small and muddy pool and enclosed by a net, was the swan's mate. One of its wings seemed broken.

And now he remembered that two of his father's men had indeed found a swan, hurt in some fight perhaps, with a rival, and had captured it to keep alive against the marriage feast.

So when he saw how the two great white birds looked so sorrowfully at each other from either side of the encircling net, unable to be together, and how his swan dropped the bread within reach of her mate, he knew he must unite them again, for his lost Love's sake. So, with his good hunting knife he cut the net and watched them go back together to the river.

Presently, thought Edgar, the mate's wing will heal and they will both fly away and I shall never see them more. But at least I shall never see them other than in freedom.

He went back to the royal Hall, where his short absence had scarcely been noticed, took his rightful seat at his father's side, and asked that a small favour might be granted on this notable day. And the King, being very pleased about the Princess of Mercia, seeing that he did not have to marry her himself, promised his dear Edgar anything, short of the crown itself.

"It is but a small thing," said Edgar, as they pledged each other in the long golden ale-horns. "Give me all the swans of Wessex,

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to do with as I please. And let there be a law that they are Prince's birds, for no man to touch without either leave or peril."

So the King laughed a Saxon laugh, thinking it natural that his son should be a little drunk at a time like this and granted his wish immediately.

And that same evening as Edgar walked by the river again, he saw a wonder. For the two swans came swimming to him, with seven grey-brown cygnets following behind. And when they came close to the bank where he stood, the parent birds floated side by side, with three young ones on the left hand and four upon the right, and they all bowed their heads to him, three times. And after that Edgar could not keep his sad story to himself any longer but told it all. And they listened in swan silence, but cocked their heads to look at him, now with one eye and now with the other. But when he came to describe the Princess of Mercia, the father swan edged a little nearer to his mate. And at the end of the story, she stretched out her lovely white neck and softly bit the Prince's hand.

Next day the King of Wessex rode out with his son and his men to meet the King of Mercia and his daughter and their men, at a place on the border of the two kingdoms where was a great oak. There a feast was prepared under the tree, for now was to be the handfasting, when each promised to marry the other, and no one else.

The Mercians were there first and, as the men of Wessex rode up they could see the Princess, on a very large strong horse, talking to her father with her face turned prudently away from her advancing suitor. So when Edgar saw her first, it was from the back; and the back view of the Princess and her horse together looked very like the shape of a cottage loaf.

Then she turned and smiled with her teeth and Edgar dropped his eyes to the ground. But when the Kings had greeted each other, Edgar steadied his courage and shook his reins to ride forward to meet her. The Princess eyed him hungrily, as if he had been a most fragrant bundle of hay and then, when he would have offered to kiss her cheek, in greeting, she turned to him her great strong teeth.

But then suddenly there came a noise, a fast approaching sound of rushing, above the tree, and then as it were a huge white arrowhead of nine swans threshing through the air straight towards them. With a *sough-sough-sough* of beating wings, the white arrowhead swept like a squall between Prince and Princess, scattering the whole party. And almost in the same moment a breathless messenger arrived to tell that a great army of Danes

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was advancing from Northumbria, a most unusual thing for it to do in winter.

So there was no handfasting that day. And for three months Edgar was so busy at the head of his army, fighting the Danes, that he had no time to think of the Princess of Mercia except when he had bad dreams. But when the fortune of war went against the Wessex men, Edgar painted a white swan upon his round, linden-wood shield. After that, fortune soon changed until the mere sight of the white swan upon the blue shield of Edgar was enough to make the Danes turn and run. Which was much the pleasantest way of fighting Danes.

In the end the enemy went home, as usual, to spend their plunder and the King of Wessex was now determined to wed his son as soon as possible. Otherwise the Mercians would be quite capable of joining the Danes, next time, against him.

So the bride was summoned and the Bishop of Dorchester—I mean the Dorchester on the Thames—arrived to perform the ceremony, and a concourse of people assembled. Though many remembered that bride and groom had never properly plighted their troth, and that handfasting had turned into swanparting.

Well, the moment came when Edgar and the Princess of Mercia, stood before the altar in the great church at Dorchester. But as the Bishop held out the ring, which had been specially blessed, there was a gasp and a murmur and then silence. There, shoving through the legs of the crowd of thanes and their wives, waddled a great white swan.

And just as Edgar took the ring from the old Bishop to put it on the Princess's finger, a white snake of a neck and a golden beak thrust up, snatched the ring and swallowed it. Then with a lurch and jump and a mighty brushing of wings over the dusty stone floor of the church, the great swan thrust herself into the air, and soared three times round the building, making all the candles flutter. Then she shut her wings and dived through the church door and was gone, and the specially blessed ring with her.

"I will not be jilted by any swan," said the Princess, and pulling another ring from one of the rheumatic fingers of the Bishop she shoved it on her finger and nodded to the old man to continue. But afterwards there were long faces at the wedding feast. Still, Wessex fare is good and at last the guests were content to make the best of things. After all, the wedding had been performed, somehow.

There were loud and continuous cheers when the Princess was led away by her maidens to the bridal chamber. When they had done with her and blown out all the candles and pulled the leather

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curtain over the window, for the moon was bright, so that all was in utter darkness, she lay awaiting her groom, and her teeth were bared in a smile.

And presently, up the turret stairs, came a soft, hesitant and shuffling step.

"He is so sweet and shy," she whispered to herself and the ceiling, and laughed softly down her nose.

Then there was a cautious tapping and fumbling at the door.

"I shall teach him to be bolder," she thought, and smiled at the invisible ceiling again.

The door opened and she waited for him to speak. But only the sound of the shuffle, with a sort of lurch in it, came nearer and nearer the bed. Then there was a scuffle and a very heavy body landed on the pillow beside her.

"I thought you were never coming," she sighed and reached out her strong arms.

And she touched—feathers.

At the same moment a stir of wind dropped the ill-fastened curtain and the moonlight shot a beam across her. And beside her, sinking sedately to rest, was a great white swan.

Wildly she screamed, then, and tried to flee. But the strong white neck that could strike like a snake, hit her a jab which knocked her flat on her back again and also robbed her of all breath.

And so she lay in terror and tears all night while the wedding feast went on with wilder and ever more mocking laughter. And in the morning, when her bedfellow had departed very early, she dressed, called her retinue and never stopped galloping till she had crossed the bounds of Mercia.

Meanwhile Edgar, protector and friend of swans, who had quietly left the feast and stolen to his own room, was wakened at dawn by the very same bird which had rid him of his bride, the great mother swan to whom he had given the bread. And he followed her to the river bank where water and sky and meadow and tree and every flower were flushed with new-risen sun. And from down the stream there came swimming twenty swans, two and two, all harnessed to a little boat. And in it, with the morning in her face, sat his young Love. And all the small birds round about opened their glad throats and sang.

Very soon, then, they were married, for no one dared say Edgar nay. And news had come that an avenging army of Mercia had been put to flight by a legion of swans which suddenly appeared from all parts of Wessex.

So Edgar and his true Love were wedded in the small church which was at Lechlade in those days. And all the people wondered,

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for Edgar and his bride walked there between a guard of swans and two cygnets held the tail of her long gown. And when the King and his thanes went to the church they found the chancel filled with white birds who stood in the candlelight like a silent choir.

And as the pair walked up to where the Bishop was waiting for them, Edgar's own swan was there, at the altar steps. Then the bird made sudden disgorging motions with its neck and dropped a ring at the Bishop's feet. And this was the self-same blessed ring which she had taken from the Princess of Mercia.

Afterwards the guard of swans brought a great linen sheet, held by the four corners and filled with swansdown, for their bed.

And when they were alone at last, it was hard not to cry for joy because they were so happy. Then Edgar took his little Love, white as thorn flowers, in his arms and laid her small face on his shoulder; and she wrapped her hair, black as thorn branches, about his neck. And their dream was sweet.

And some time after this Edgar caused a great white swan to be carved high up on the chalk hills above Wantage, where his Love had been shut away from him. And you can see it to this day—a great curving white neck near the summit; though ignorant people call it The White Horse. But if you look for yourself you will see that it is Edgar's own swan, in the act of pecking the Princess of Mercia.

And so may you be as happy as Edgar was, all the days of his life.

* * *

## *ELEMENTARY*

The late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once took a taxi to his hotel in Paris. As he paid the driver, the latter said, "*Merci, Monsieur* Doyle."

"How do you know my name?" asked the author.

"I saw in the papers that you were arriving from the south of France today," explained the man. "Your general appearance shows you are an Englishman. You have had a haircut in the past week, and it is evident that your hair was cut by a barber in the south of France."

"Amazing!" cried the creator of Sherlock Holmes. "You had no other evidence to go on?"

"Nothing," replied the driver, "except the fact that your name is on your luggage."

From *The Tatler*

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# SALVATORE

**He possessed nothing in the world—but the rarest gift of all**

## by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

I WONDER if I can do it . . .

I knew Salvatore first when he was a boy of fifteen with a pleasant, ugly face, a laughing mouth and carefree eyes. He used to spend the morning lying about the beach with next to nothing on, and his brown body was as thin as a rail. He was full of grace. He was in and out of the sea all the time, swimming with the clumsy, effortless stroke common to the fisherboys. Scrambling up the jagged rocks on his hard feet, for except on Sundays he never wore shoes, he would throw himself into the deep water with a cry of delight.

His father was a fisherman who owned his own little vineyard and Salvatore acted as nursemaid to his two younger brothers. He shouted to them to come in shore when they ventured out too far, and made them dress when it was time to climb the hot, vineclad hill for the frugal midday meal.

But boys in those Southern parts grow apace, and in a little while he was madly in love with a pretty girl who lived on the Grande Marina. She had eyes like forest pools and held herself like a daughter of the Cæsars. They were affianced, but they could not marry till Salvatore had done his military service, and when he left the island, which he had never left in his life before, to become a sailor in the navy of King Victor Emmanuel, he wept like a child.

It was hard for one who had never been less free than the birds to be at the beck and call of others; it was harder still to live in a battleship with strangers instead of in a little white cottage among the vines; and when he was ashore, to walk in noisy, friendless cities with streets so crowded that he was frightened to cross them, when he had been used to silent paths and the mountains and the sea. I suppose it had never struck him that Ischia, which he looked at every evening—it was like a fairy island in the sunset—to see what the weather would be like the next day, or Vesuvius, pearly in the dawn, had anything to do with him at all; but when he ceased to have them before his eyes he realized, in some dim fashion, that they were as much part of him as his hands and his feet.

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He was dreadfully homesick. But it was hardest of all to be parted from the girl he loved with all his passionate young heart. He wrote to her, in his childlike handwriting, long, ill-spelt letters in which he told her how constantly he thought of her, and how much he longed to be back. He was sent here and there, to Spezia, to Venice, to Bari and finally to China. There he fell ill of some mysterious ailment that kept him in hospital for months.

He bore it with the mute and uncomprehending patience of a dog. When he learnt that it was a form of rheumatism that made him unfit for further service his heart exulted, for he could go home; and he did not bother, in fact he scarcely listened, when the doctors told him that he would never again be quite well. What did he care when he was going back to the little island he loved so well, and the girl who was waiting for him?

When he got into the rowing boat that met the steamer from Naples and was rowed ashore, he saw his father and mother standing on the jetty with his two brothers, big boys now, and he waved to them. His eyes searched among the crowd that waited there, for the girl.

He could not see her. There was a great deal of kissing when he jumped up the steps and they all, emotional creatures, cried a little as they exchanged their greetings. He asked where the girl was. His mother told him that she did not know; they had not seen her for two or three weeks; so in the evening when the moon was shining over the placid sea and the lights of Naples twinkled in the distance he walked down to the Grande Marina to her house.

She was sitting on the doorstep with her mother. He was a little shy because he had not seen her for so long. He asked her if she had not received the letter he had written to her to say he was coming home.

Yes, they had received a letter, and they had been told by another of the island boys that he was ill. Yes, that was why he was back; was it not a piece of luck? Oh, but they had heard that he would never be quite well again. The doctors talked a lot of nonsense, but he knew very well that now he was home again he would recover.

They were silent for a little, and then the mother nudged the girl. She did not try to soften the blow. She told him straight out, with the blunt directness of her race that she could not marry a man who would never be strong enough to work like a man. They had made up their minds, her mother and father and she, and her father would never give his consent.

When Salvatore went home he found that they all knew. The girl's father had been to tell them what they had decided, but they

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had lacked the courage to tell him themselves. He wept on his mother's bosom. He was terribly unhappy, but he did not blame the girl. A fisherman's life is hard and it needs strength and endurance. He knew very well that a girl could not afford to marry a man who might not be able to support her. His smile was very sad and his eyes had the look of a dog that has been beaten, but he did not complain, and he never spoke of the girl he had loved so well.

Then, a few months later, when he had settled down to the common round, working in his father's vineyard and fishing, his mother told him that there was a young woman in the village who was willing to marry him. Her name was Assunta.

" She's as ugly as the devil," he said.

She was older than he, twenty four or twenty five, and she had been engaged to a man who, while doing his military service, had been killed in Africa. She had a little money of her own, and if Salvatore married her she could buy him a boat of his own and they could take a vineyard that by a happy chance happened at that moment to be without a tenant.

His mother told him that Assunta had seen him at the *festa* and had fallen in love with him. Salvatore smiled his sweet smile and said he would think about it.

On the following Sunday dressed in the stiff black clothes in which he looked so much less well than in the ragged shirt and trousers of every day, he went to High Mass at the parish church and placed himself so that he could have a good look at the young woman. When he came down again he told his mother that he was willing.

Well, they were married and they settled down in a tiny white-washed house in the middle of a handsome vineyard. Salvatore was now a great big husky fellow, tall and broad, but still with that ingenuous smile and those trusting, kindly eyes that he had had as a boy. He had the most beautiful manners I have ever seen in my life.

Assunta was a grim-visaged female, with decided features, and she looked old for her years. But she had a good heart and she was no fool. I used to be amused by the little smile of devotion that she gave her husband when he was being very masculine and masterful; she never ceased to be touched by his gentle sweetness. But she could not bear the girl who had thrown him over, and notwithstanding Salvatore's smiling expostulations she had nothing but harsh words for her. Presently children were born to them.

It was a hard enough life. All through the fishing season towards evening he set out in his boat with one of his brothers for the fishing grounds. It was a long pull of six or seven miles, and he spent the

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night catching the profitable cuttlefish. Then there was the long row back again in order to sell the catch in time for it to go on the early boat to Naples.

At other times he was working in his vineyard from dawn till the heat drove him to rest, and then again, when it was a trifle cooler, till dusk. Often his rheumatism prevented him from doing anything at all and then he would lie about the beach, smoking cigarettes, with a pleasant word for everyone notwithstanding the pain that racked his limbs. The foreigners who came down to bathe and saw him there said that these Italian fishermen were lazy devils.

Sometimes he used to bring his children down to give them a bath. They were both boys and at this time the elder was three and the younger less than two. They sprawled about at the water's edge stark naked and Salvatore, standing on a rock, would dip them in the water. The elder one bore it with stoicism, but the baby screamed lustily.

Salvatore had enormous hands, like legs of mutton, coarse and hard from constant toil, but when he bathed his children, holding them so tenderly, drying them with delicate care, upon my word they were like flowers. He would seat the naked baby on the palm of his hand and hold him up, laughing a little at his smallness, and his laugh was like the laughter of an angel. His eyes then were as candid as his child's.

I started by saying that I wondered if I could do it, and now I must tell you what it is that I tried to do. I wanted to see whether I could hold your attention for a few pages while I drew for you the portrait of a man, just an ordinary Italian fisherman who possessed nothing in the world except a quality which is the rarest, the most precious and the loveliest that anyone can have.

Heaven only knows why he should so strangely and unexpectedly have possessed it. All I know is that it shone in him with a radiance that, if it had not been so unconscious and so humble, would have been to the common run of men hardly bearable. And in case you have not guessed what the quality was, I will tell you. Goodness, just goodness.

* * *

## *OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES . . .*

*"The Armistice after the First World War," wrote a schoolboy in a recent examination paper, "was signed on the eleventh of November in* 1918. *Since then there have been two minutes peace every year."*

*North Carolina Education*

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# SMALL WONDER

**That gold had a life of its own—a gleaming, provocative, deadly lure**

## by GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

THIS priest I'm trying to tell you about wasn't really a priest. But he had the makings. He knew the ABC's. He had been an altar boy and a high soprano until his voice bull-frogged. Even after the fathers judged him too carnal to be a real priest and expelled him from the school, and he took to the road, he could still talk nicely about sin and advise against it.

Before there was anything to shave off his face, Alfredo had had blood on his hands, and usually there was money in his pockets that belonged to others. His voice bull-frogged its way into a tenor that was both sweet and loud. And when he came riding into Ladrone, singing his head off and his heart out, certain ladies of the town who knew who was who and what was what, shivered and put on their gladdest rags.

He never married.

He didn't have to.

But one day he got all wrought up over a thick slice of green gold that looked as if it had been sawed from a bar of the same, and he shot a man in such icy cold blood that the whole town turned against its favourite and chased him into the mountains. There, because it was above the woods, pockets of soil that would show the imprints of a horse were few and far between, and easily avoided, and because he had stolen one of the fastest horses in the southwest, he soon gave them the slip. And because of the time and place, with night coming on too, the sheriff and his posse stopped chasing Alfredo.

But he knew that in a general way they would always be after him, and that the quicker he grew a beard and never came back, the better.

There would have to be an altogether new country for him; new hills and mountains and forests and deserts. New cronies, and new ladies to shiver when he sang.

He and the rawboned black stallion were both tired. There was nothing for either of them to eat; it would soon be bitterly cold; and they had left Ladrone in such a hurry they hadn't even a saddle between them.

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What might have been mistaken for an expression of remorse came over Alfredo's face. But it wasn't remorse. It was the kind of expression that comes over a man's face when he realizes that he has done something absolutely idiotic.

He felt through all his pockets to make sure, but it was only too true. In the desperate haste of his getaway, he had stowed the slice of green gold into the pocket that had the hole.

For nearly five minutes, what sounded like powerful liquid music poured out of his mouth.

He was swearing in Spanish.

There was nothing to do but ride on, cold and penniless, and let his beard grow. So he rode on over the ridge. It was just as bitterly cold on the other side, but the air didn't seem to run about quite as much.

It was almost dark, and he decided to dismount and rest through the hours that would be absolutely dark. The night would be the first of the pitchy nights of the new moon.

He didn't know where he was. He lacked one of the earmarks of a first class highwayman: he did not have a good bump of location. He was ashamed of this and was often twitted about it by his fellow outlaws. By Ernesto and Juan and Juanito, and by the Americano, Bill, and especially by the versatile Montoyo.

However, the morning would show up certain mountains that could not be mistaken for others, and there was no danger that he would get himself into the vicinity of Ladrone.

When you toss the reins of a well trained southwestern horse over his head, he stands indefinitely, but not when it is as bitterly cold as it was that night. In the morning, the black stallion had gone, and of course he had gone straight back to Ladrone. There wouldn't be any chance of the black stallion's keeping out of those pockets of soil which Alfredo had avoided. His feet hurt him from galloping over hard rock, and the soft pockets of soil eased them. He hunted them all out and left a trail back to Ladrone that a child could have followed.

For Alfredo there was no comfort in this piece of certain knowledge. He looked about him and found that he had a companion.

A dead priest.

It was soon obvious that this priest, after being bitten by a rattlesnake, had toppled over into the shade of a rock. Here, either one scorpion had stung him twice, or two scorpions had stung him once apiece. Anyway his face was swollen beyond all possibility of recognition.

But his face was the same colour as Alfredo's. And he had the same kind of black hair and the same kind of haircut. Perhaps he

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hadn't really been a priest either. And this happy coincidence restored Alfredo to renewed hope and energy.

He changed clothes with the priest. To make the change as realistic as possible, he left with the body his own gun and cartridges, his breeches and leather boots, and his strong hunting knife.

"The sheriff and his savage *bastardos* will follow the tracks of the black stallion, and what will they find at the end of the trail? They will find him whom they seek. They will find me—dead. Dead as a sardine. They will drag me down to the woods and hang me on the limb of the first tree they can find. Vengeance will be theirs. Society will be satisfied."

So he girded up his robe and scuttled off in a general downward direction. He was careful, of course, as before, to leave no trail, but they would hardly be looking for one. Not now that he was dead!

By dark, he was below the woods. The air was warmer, but he was hungrier, and he suffered from that cruel nervous trouble that comes over a smoker who has run out of cigarettes.

In a desperate attempt to catch a baby rabbit when it wasn't looking, he fell and hurt himself and tore the skirt of the heavy, gold robe he had taken from the dead priest.

The next day, he limped along very slowly still in a downward direction until his whole system was so starved that he began to see things. At first, the things he saw were nothing but spots that wouldn't stay put. But after a while, a small flock of the spots settled on a distant hilltop and became tiny houses, each painted a different colour. And he could hear, loud; definite, and clankety, the sounds of a tractor, and he caught a glimpse of it ploughing a distant field. Among the many coloured houses on the hilltop was what looked like a little steeple, a little finger of God beckoning and offering help to those in need.

If the town and the steeple were real, and if he could reach them, all might yet be well. But he doubted his ability to go much farther. Indeed, he doubted his ability to do much but lie down and die.

But help was at hand. Help was at hand in the shape of a very small Indian child.

He, she, or it was dressed in a pair of blue dungarees, and a bright shirt over which cowboys and cattle raced and pranced. His, her, or its face was nothing much but a pair of exceedingly dark and seeing eyes.

"What is your name, Little One?" asked Alfredo.

And the child said that her name was indeed Pequeña, the Little One. Then she gave him a hand and said, "Come."

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He managed to get up and go. She led him a very little way to where clear, clean water bubbled out of the ground. When he had drunk too much of this, she reached into one of her dungaree pockets and brought out a tiny handful of parched corn.

In his eagerness, Alfredo spilled a number of grains on the ground, but she rescued these and replaced them in his hand.

When Alfredo had finished eating, the Little One dug into the other pocket of her trousers and produced tobacco, cigarette papers, and a box of matches.

With great deftness, almost in the twinkling of an eye, she rolled a cigarette for Alfredo and one for herself and lighted them.

When they had finished their smoke, she suddenly knelt down facing him and switched from Spanish to Latin. She beat her little flat chest with her hands, tears ran down her cheeks, and she exclaimed, "*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!*"

Of course it seemed perfect ages since she had had a chance to confess her sins to a priest, and she poured them all out now in an eloquent flood.

Alfredo, who was feeling better every moment, smiled inside himself. This Little One, he thought, deserves the first prize for good conduct and punctuality and honesty and thoughtfulness.

But he kept his face grave and explained that though her sins were not sufficient to keep her out of Heaven if the last trumpet were to sound at that very moment, nevertheless it was always best to play safe.

"And I must do penance, Father?"

"Yes, indeed, Little One, and then I will be able to promise you that God the Father will overlook your sins."

"Tell me what I must do, and I will do it, even if you tell me to wallow naked in a bed of cholla until I am all wounded and bleeding."

This time, Alfredo smiled openly.

"Little One," he said, "your sins are as slight and delicate as butterflies. For penance you shall roll me another cigarette."

The little beige house facing the little violet church was the Priest's House. It always had been. Priests came and priests went. But the little house, it seemed, went on forever. Every year, it received a fresh coat of plaster and, in consequence, the surface of its walls were pleasantly undulating, and the walls themselves were enormously thick. The rooms within the walls got a little smaller every year.

The same could be said of all the houses in the little hilltop town. They were spick and span and as clean as whistles. And every year, each one of them grew a little bigger without and a little

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smaller within. They were so clean that fleas, cockroaches, and scorpions avoided them.

" And so now, once more again," said Pequeña, the Little One, " we have a priest, and the priest is in his house. Do you like your house, Father ? "

" I could lie down on that little white bed," said Alfredo, " and sleep forever. And when I waked, I would look at the framed portraits of holy persons on the walls and think I was in Heaven."

" In the meanwhile," observed the Little One, " I go to my father, who is our Chief, to tell him that we now once more have a priest."

" What became of the last one you had ? "

" He was overcome by temptation and tried to steal from us. We took him and beat him and then we led him a long way from here and let him go . . . Now I must tell my father that we have a new priest."

" Tell him," said Alfredo, with great earnestness, " that the new priest, though young, is a true man of God and not to be touched by the foul talons of any temptation whatever."

" Are you also," asked Pequeña, " like most of them, something of a doctor ? "

As a matter of fact, Alfredo had had a great deal of first aid experience with gunshot wounds, knife wounds, snake bites, or scorpion stings, and when Pequeña pushed open a little door and showed him shelves in the thickness of the walls on which were many bottles and jars of medicine, sealed bandages of various widths, and a thick book in Spanish in which you could hunt about until you found just what was the matter with you and what to do about it, he felt safe in assuring the Little One that he was also something of a doctor.

" I shall tell my father that on Sunday at the usual time you will say a Mass, and that thereafter you will hear confessions."

A refreshed Alfredo said an excellent Mass on Sunday morning and sang a lot of it in his beautiful tenor voice. The little church was so crowded that some of the more active Indians had to crowd into the niches of the plaster saints. Alfredo had never seen a congregation so clean and starchy.

After the Mass, he heard confessions. He heard them for hours and hours, the next day and the day after that. The people's sins had been piling up for years.

On the whole, the confessions disappointed and disgusted him. He learned that in that place extramarital relations were darkly frowned upon, and that every woman in the town was virtuous,

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and always had been, and always intended to be. The last person to confess was Pequeña's father, the Chief and the Law.

He resembled a Spanish grandee rather than an Indian. He confessed to having read and travelled perhaps more than was necessary.

" But surely, my son," said Alfredo, " to read and travel more than is necessary is not a sin."

" With us," said Don Louis, " to overdo anything whatever is a sin. And to have more of anything than we need is even worse. But there is a more definite sin on my conscience. My legs hurt me, and I almost decided to cut out both Mass and confession."

" But you did neither."

" I would have done both but for the Little One."

" She who keeps my house clean and prepares my food ? And what did she do to persuade you to limp in the path of righteousness?"

" As the Americans say, Father, she raised hell."

" It doesn't do to thwart the Little One," said Alfredo reminiscently. " If with your people it is really a sin to have too much of anything, then I fear that your daughter's immortal soul is in grave danger. She has too much religion ! "

Don Louis' face had a look of agreement, and he crossed himself.

" But let us get down to business. Because of your lameness, you were tempted not to come to Mass and confession, but you resisted this temptation and came. Your sins cannot, of course, be overlooked, but your penance will be light and probably agreeable. At the earliest opportunity, you will tell me the history of your tribe, and how it happens that you are cleaner and more virtuous than the other tribes, and how it is that, unlike them who have almost nothing, you and yours have almost everything. A tractor to plough and harrow your fields ; a machine which makes a wise and just distribution of the manure from your horses and cattle. The collars and cuffs of your shirts are not frayed, or only a little. And here in the church, the smell of incense and the smell of soap vie for the upper hand."

" What opportunity," said Don Louis, " could be earlier than here and now ? "

" None," said Alfredo.

" To put the last things first," said Don Louis, " the reason for all the things which appear to astonish you is that we have hidden away in the mountains in the shape of neat little bars "— he indicated the approximate size with his beautiful, eloquent hands—" we have close to a billion dollars' worth of gold from Peru."

Alfredo recalled the sawed-off slice of green gold that he had put in the pocket with the hole, and if he had had chops like a wolf, he would have licked them.

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Don Louis continued the mild penance of narration that had been imposed upon him. "We are probably," he said, "a branch of the Yaqui nation. We have many things in common, including a love of virtue, and a language most difficult to speak, even for us.

"We used to live near the mouth of a river which empties into the Gulf of California, somewhere up near the top end. There was almost too much game in the mountains, and in the sea there were almost too many fish. We had more than we needed of both and ran to fat.

"My own ancestor, Moralukapuka, who was the chief in the very old days of which I am telling you, was the fattest of the lot. It took a child quite a long time to walk all the way round him, and when he sat meditating on his responsibilities, he cast such a large cool shadow that his entire family could sleep in it.

"One day a ship that looked like a small mountain of snow came up from the south and anchored in the mouth of the river. I who have travelled know that this ship was in reality a little bit of a thing as ships go, but our ancestors knew no such thing, and some of the tribe fell down in convulsions and had to be buried as soon as the tribe found time.

"Some tall men with wide hats, big beards, and loose robes bound to their middle with ropes, began to come ashore in a small boat, and our people gathered on the beach to greet them as they landed and to knock the visitors on the head.

"It was our tribal custom to kill strangers as soon after sighting them as possible, and then to wonder for generations what kind of people they would have turned out to be if we had let them live. But on this occasion our old tribal custom was set aside by a cannon ball.

"Several hundred immensely fat men, women, and children dispersed from that place in all directions as fast as they were able. And only my ancestor, the great Moralukapuka, stood his ground, and then sat it.

"To make the narrative a little shorter, and to sharpen it by what we were to learn during the next three or four hundred years, the bearded men were Franciscans and that little galleon which had brought them was down to her waterline because of innumerable little chests filled to the brim with little bars of the green Inca gold of Peru."

Once more, if Alfredo had had the chops of a wolf, he would have licked them. "The Franciscans," he asked, "had perhaps stolen it from the Incas?"

"No, not stolen," said Don Louis. "For the glory of God and for the pressing needs of our Mother Church, the holy men were simply transferring the gold from one place to another. They put

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our tribe to work for the first time in history, and by the time the gold had been transferred from the beach to a safe place high in the mountains, many of the older people could speak a little Spanish, and all of the children could speak it fluently. They were all as thin as scarecrows in a cornfield. And from those days to these, not one of us has ever been really fat because we have learned to eat what we need and no more."

"And then what happened?"

"The French have a word for it. We were completely *bouleversé:* turned end to end and upside down. We gratefully adopted the religion the Franciscans taught us because it was much less horrible than our own, and we learned that needs and desires are not at all the same things.

"We learned that a man's needs are holy things, which of course vary a little from generation to generation, and that his desires will surely lead him into the suburbs of hell before he is dead. Over the mouth of the cave in which the little bars of gold were neatly stacked, the Franciscans inscribed in large letters the words:

"'*TAKE WHAT YOU NEED AND NO MORE.*'

"And that became the motto of our tribe.

"So that there might not be endless disputes as to what was a true need and what was not, the right to decide was given to my great ancestor, the Chief Moralukapuka, and was bequeathed by him to his son, and so on, until now that particular power and responsibility are mine.

"Several times a year I call upon the people to submit their needs in writing; from these lists, I delete what are nothing but desires. Then I make a list of their true needs and consult the wish books."

"Wish books?" queried Alfredo.

"Catalogues. I determine just about what it will cost to supply the people with their true needs, and I then journey to the hidden cave, the whereabouts of which is known only to me and to my little son. With a hacksaw—and, by the way, we shall soon *need* a new blade—I take from one of the bars as much gold, and no more, as seems needed."

"You could, of course, look ahead and bring in, say, a dozen bars at a time and do the sawing here. It would save a lot of travelling to and from."

"But it would be a grave departure from the instructions inscribed over the mouth of the treasure cave: '*TAKE WHAT YOU NEED AND NO MORE.*' But the idea is appealing. If I had in my home a small reserve of gold, it would come in very handy at the moment. The people, many of them, actually need this, that, and the other right now. A journey to the treasure cave is clearly indicated. Only my little son and I know the way. I am

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so lame that the pain of two days in the saddle is not to be considered; and my little son, while climbing to get from the nest of a wild bird some eggs he did not in the least need, fell and broke his arm. For him to saw slices of gold from a bar with only a dull hacksaw is out of the question."

"What became of the Franciscan Fathers?"

"They went away in the little ship, leaving us to guard the gold, which belonged at once to the Glory of God and our Mother Church, and they told us that in return for our good offices we could, from time to time, take from the great store as much gold as was essential to our actual needs and no more.

"For a long time we took none, but then there began to be towns with shops in them; and later came the great mail-order houses, smelting and refining houses, and money orders and cashier's cheques and the like, and the gold of which we were the guardians began to come into its own.

"The Franciscans promised that someday they would return and transport the whole of the treasure to Spain, where the Glory of God is brighter and the needs of the Mother Church more pressing and complicated than they are hereabouts. But that was three or four hundred years ago, and they have not returned, and only the other day at Manila and Santiago de Cuba the mighty navies of Spain were blown sky high. And that unhappy country no longer has even a king to call her own."

"What will be the situation, Don Louis, if your lameness persists and even grows worse, and if your little son, who also knows the whereabouts of the gold, were to come another cropper and this time, instead of his arm, he were to break his neck?"

"You have named a possibility that must be faced."

"How do you happen to be lame, Don Louis?"

"The other day when the people submitted their lists of needs in writing, there was one list in which needs and desires were so greedily and hopelessly confused that I sent for the fellow who had made it out, and I said to him, 'Equisto, what you really need is a good swift kick in the behind.' Forthwith I supplied him with this pressing need—and, in consequence, I am lame. But the lameness will pass."

"And in the meantime you actually need a few slices of gold and can't get them."

"You, Father Alfredo, guided by my little son, shall visit the treasure cave in my stead. You will, of course, have to be blindfolded."

"There will be no need to blindfold me," said Alfredo happily, "because the bump of locality I am supposed to have is conspicuous by its absence."

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"You will be blindfolded," said Don Louis, "but not until you have passed through the Hole in the Wall. That is no more than an hour's ride from here. Having passed through the Hole in the Wall, my little son, with the help of my little daughter, will blindfold you—a little sack drawn down over your head will be the best way. Then, even if your bump of locality should come to life, there will be no danger of your remembering just how you got from the Hole in the Wall to the treasure cave and back again."

"Does the Little One also know the way to the treasure cave?"

"Only two must know the way at any one time, but since my knowledge of it may no longer be of any practical value, it is as if it did exist. And it may be fairly assumed that only my little son now knows the way. Because, as you suggest, the next time my little son, Alesandro, comes a cropper, he may very well break his neck, it is now necessary for the Little One to share the secret.

"She will, therefore, accompany you on the journey. 'Sandro will show you where and in how many places the bar of gold is to be sawed, and the sawing will be done by you. The work is too heavy for children."

A ridge of sandstone had been worn so thin by time and weather that in one place it had been worn through, and the round Hole in the Wall, as it was called perhaps seventy feet in diameter could be seen from afar. It was definitely a landmark. Looking back over the desert and cultivated fields that lay below, Alfredo could see the little town which they had left at the crack of dawn.

The region beyond the Hole in the Wall rose steadily until it became mountains. It was mostly rock—sharp, upended, and precipitous, a sea of labyrinths.

The children, "babies," thought Alfredo, were on foot, dressed alike in blue dungarees, shirts stamped with images of grazing cattle and cowboys, and moccasins. A little burro, with a friendly disposition and a nice way of smiling, carried Alfredo and whatever would be needed for the journey. This was parched corn to keep body and soul going along together, and two cans of drinking water. The burro also carried feed for himself and a nosebag to eat it from. But it was actually Alfredo who carried the nosebag—upended and drawn down over his head and eyes. He could catch occasional glimpses of the rock and sand over which they were journeying, but no more.

This was annoying, because Alesandro almost continuously explained the secret ways they were following to Pequeña and pointed out the landmarks—the Chief's face, the Dead Lion, the horses seen from behind, and so forth.

At noon, the little party halted to eat. The nosebag was with-

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drawn from Alfredo's head and, with a little feed in the bottom, was then drawn upwards over the burro's nose.

Alfredo got down from the saddle and looked blinkingly about him, but there was no view to be had in any direction but up. And what was to be seen looking up did not even suggest to him the points of the compass.

" Well, my child," said Alesandro to his sister, who was almost as big as himself, " could you find your way back from here to the Hole in the Wall ? "

" Blindfolded," said Pequeña.

" To boast," said Alfredo, " is to sin."

" But she is not boasting, Father. It runs in the family. My Father had only to show me the way from the Hole in the Wall to the treasure cave once. On the return journey, it was I who took the lead and showed him the way, and although at the time it was one of the three black nights of the new moon, I made no mistake. To state facts is not to boast ! "

All that they really needed for the noonday meal was a handful of parched corn apiece ; but Alfredo could have eaten an additional steak or two with a hatful of French fried potatoes. In his eagerness to eat the corn, he spilled some of it on the ground. Pequeña recovered all of the flouted grains and put them in his mouth for him.

If she had done this in silence, it would have been a pretty little service ; but her memory, considering her age and size, was prodigious, and she liked to give tongue to it. Remembering what a former priest had taught her, she shook an admonitory finger under Alfredo's nose and said, " Waste not, want not."

Alfredo's nerves were so on edge that he could have slapped her—but he didn't.

Meanwhile, 'Sandro had hacked open a barrel cactus, so that the burro could eat enough of the watery pulp to satisfy his thirst. Alfredo and the two children each had a drink from one of the cans, and then the nosebag was once more upended, pulled down over Alfredo's head and eyes, and the journey resumed.

" My child," Alesandro finally said to his sister, " do you see where those two honey coloured rocks look as if they were biting each other ? "

She said that she saw.

" Well, remember them, because it is there that we turn sharply to the right and begin to go up and up and up."

" I see also," said the rude little girl, " that it would not be possible to turn in any other direction."

" Go to the head of the class," said Alesandro.

" I cannot very well go to the head of the class," said the Little One, " because I am always there already."

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" Is she," asked Alfredo, " boasting or stating a fact ? "

" Alas," said Alesandro, " she is stating a fact. She has yet to experience the shame of the dunce's stool."

And then they were there.

Pequeña and Alesandro, with his one good arm, helped Alfredo down from the burro and withdrew the feed bag from his head.

At the foot of a sheer, stark, saffron-coloured cliff, the mouth of a cave had been neatly masonried into a small, arched doorway. In the doorway, badly hung and swinging ajar, was a wooden door.

Above the door, beautiful immense letters had been cut into the cliff. Alfredo did not know that the letters were beautiful; but only that they were large and clear, and that he could read what they said. Unmistakably they said:

' *TAKE WHAT YOU NEED AND NO MORE.*'

" The day," said Alesandro, " is now old and frail—"

" Decrepit," added the Little One, who was proud of her vocabulary.

" —we shall therefore eat and sleep. In the morning, we shall enter the treasure cave and see the gold in all its glory, and you, Father, shall saw from one of the little bars as many slices as our people happen to need at the moment—and no more."

" *Nada más*," echoed the Little One and began dividing parched corn into three equal portions.

Between them and the door of the treasure cave, a bright, shallow stream of water bubbled and burbled. It came out from under one cliff and vanished under another. And when they had finished their ration of corn, or almost, it was from this water rather than from a musty can that they drank their fill.

The " almost " was a few grains of corn that Alfredo, in his eagerness to get a little sustenance into his stomach, had spilled. But Pequeña, grinning, picked them up, and he was glad to lick them from the palm of her tiny hand.

" The Little One," he said, " is not enough of a name for your talented and versatile sister. She ought to be called the little something or other—the Little Know-It-All for instance. And then some."

" Once," said Alesandro, " when she corrected our teacher on a point of grammar, he called her ' The Little Insufferable One.' "

" Not at all bad," said Alfredo.

" Of course, she is always picking up the things that I have dropped, parched corn, burned matches, or cigarette ash; and even things that I haven't dropped but have thrown away, abandoned, hoping to see the last of. We might call her the Little Pickerupper."

The Little Pickerupper undid the roll of blankets and divided them. There was one apiece.

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It was growing cold in that deep, dark place.

" Time to sleep," said Alesandro.

" Time to pray," said his sister.

Shivering a little, Alfredo murmured an exceptionally pious prayer in the Latin language. This was no sooner finished than the children slept.

" How easy it would be," thought Alfredo, " to knock these dreadful brats on the head, make use of their blankets, and in the morning take as much of the gold as I can carry, and begin life all over again from the beginning."

But he knew himself to be not in the midst of one labyrinth but of a hundred. He knew that without guidance he could never hope to get out of the place. Buzzards would get him out a bit at a time ! He consoled himself by consigning the children to the fires of hell. Then, because he was so tired and ached all over, he himself slept.

Once Alfredo had chopped a cord of wood for his grandmother. A cord of wood, she had told him, when neatly stacked, was eight feet long by four feet wide by four feet high. And she had stood over him with a tape measure.

The good Fathers had put her up to this. They had told her that when a grandchild begins to look upon the wine because it is red, and the girls because they are plump, there is nothing better for him than regular exercise with an axe. But when the old lady had told him that it was time to cut a second cord, he had run away from home and turned bandit.

The stack of green Peruvian gold in the cave seemed to have a life of its own. It did not, of course, speak or move, but Alfredo could have sworn that the way it gleamed and glistened at him was deliberately provocative. And there was lots more than a cord of the stuff. He hefted a bar and judged its weight to be about fifty pounds. Taking extra-long steps of about three feet each, he measured the length and breadth of the stack. It was about four feet.

The good Fathers, together with religion, had taught him the elements of simple arithmetic, and he still remembered how to add, subtract, divide, and multiply. But when it became necessary to learn the cubic contents of a stack of gold, his brain began to swim.

" Little One," he said, " how much is twelve, multiplied by five and a half, multiplied by four ? "

The mind of the Little One had a good deal in common with chain lightning, and with perfect assurance she answered his question.

" Two hundred and sixty four," she said.

" If a bar of gold," said Alfredo, " weighs fifty pounds and there are twelve ounces in each pound, how many ounces are there in a whole bar ? "

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" Six hundred," said the Little One without batting an eye.

" And if," continued Alfredo, " up there in the United States of North America, there is a fool gringo who will pay thirty five dollars for every ounce of gold that he can get his hands on, and no questions asked ? "

" It comes to an even twenty one thousand dollars," said the Little One.

Alfredo's knees were turning to water, and his head was lighter than a feather and getting lighter every moment. He had just sense enough to say, " True riches are of two kinds."

He knelt and leaned his head against the great, gleaming, glistening, stack of gold.

Really and truly, the hacksaw did need a new blade. The teeth of the old one were so plugged with gold there was hardly any bite left in them.

Sweating from every pore, his right arm and hand aching from sawing, his left hand aching from holding the tag end of a gold bar steady, Alfredo again and again called the children to witness.

" I shall tell your father that we *need* a new blade for the hacksaw and you must bear me out. Also we *need* a little vice to hold the bar."

Before he had finished the last cut that had to be made, Alfredo, for the first and last time in his life, actually hated the sight of gold. And if the children had not understood Spanish, he would have poured upon it a torrent of curses and vile names that might well have frozen their young blood.

Most of the time during the endless job of sawing, Alesandro slept, but the Little Pickerupper had work to do. Since all the gold, except what the tribe actually needed, belonged to the Glory of God and the needs of the Mother Church, she made it her business to recover and pouch every least particle that fell from the saw cuts to the clean floor of the cave.

When Alfredo was again astride the burro, and the feed bag had been drawn down over his head and eyes, he uttered a little prayer, completely sincere for once, of thanksgiving.

The Little Pickerupper took the lead and without a word of advice or correction from her brother, and without once hesitating over a direction, guided them all the way to the Hole in the Wall.

Even Alfredo could have guided them the rest of the way.

The children ran on ahead with the slices of gold and the little pouch of dust. At the sight of his home, the burro broke at once into a jerky trot, but he could not catch up with them.

As for Alfredo, he no longer hated the sight of gold. Memories of the vast treasure in the cave aroused in him the more worthy emotions of love and longing, and, in deadly earnest, he began to

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scheme out ways and means of acquiring a large quantity of it for himself and a small group of his most trustworthy friends.

But he could not hit on any scheme that made sense.

Time passed, and his beard grew and grew until it was doubtful if his own mother would have known him; and he began to think that he could now, disguised as a holy Father, visit the town of Ladrone with impunity.

One day after Mass, Don Louis, whose lameness was no better, once more called upon the people to submit lists of their needs in writing and one of the first lists to be turned in was in the unformed, childish writing of Alfredo.

*Believe it or not*, he wrote, *I, too, am a sinful man. I do not actually do wicked; but sometimes, God help me, because I am still young, I think wicked, and the need to confess my sins to a fellow priest and start doing penance, to be absolved and forgiven, is pressing. I need, then, to visit the town of Ladrone, where there is a large church, a monastery, and more priests than you can shake a stick at.*

Soon after receiving this, Don Louis invited Alfredo to visit him.

"Your need," he said, "is indeed a real one and not a desire. You will, therefore, be permitted to visit the town of Ladrone as soon as may be. And as it is thought to be a skilful rather than a greedy thing to kill two birds with one stone, and as it will soon be time for us to plant our corn, you will be furnished with an escort and four or five packhorses. In one of my wish books, I have read about a new type of hybrid corn that promises wonderful results. It is my judgement that as a progressive tribe we actually need to try it."

"Will it be necessary to pay for this hybrid corn, or can it be charged?"

"You will be furnished with a slice of gold."

"But I thought all the slices I helped bring from the cave had been spent."

"And so they have. Therefore, before you journey to Ladrone in search of seed corn and absolution, it will be necessary for you to visit the treasure cave for a second time and saw off some more."

Alfredo paled at the thought.

But Don Louis smiled. "You made it clear to me, Father, that a new blade for the hacksaw, and a vice to hold the bar that was being sawed were absolute necessities. These have been provided."

Alfredo's colour returned.

"When shall I go?"

"At once. And I only hope that you will be able to find the cave without too much trouble."

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" We found it the other time."

" Then you have not heard what has happened to my little son ? "

" I hope and trust that this time it is not his neck."

" Only a leg," said Don Louis. " All the children of the tribe came to meet me at once and said that the one real need they had in this world was a rugby football, and a book of rules. I decided, after a time, that to a set of healthy, progressive children, these were perhaps real needs and not mere wanton desires, and I gave in to them. Well, then, this very morning, Alesandro, while attempting a dive into the scrum, fell and broke his left leg. He will, therefore, be unable to serve you as a guide. I myself am still *hors de combat*, as the French say, and there remains in all this whole world only the Little One, who may or may not know the way from the Hole in the Wall to the treasure cave and back."

Alfredo crossed himself. The thought of being hopelessly lost with only the Little One for a companion gave him the horrors.

But the Little One had learned the way perfectly. The vice held ; the saw sawed ; all was well. And if it had not been for the feed bag drawn down over his head and eyes, Alfredo would have enjoyed the entire trip from A to Z.

For one thing, the sky was overcast and the days cool. The nights were as cold as ever, but the Pickerupper had decided that the good Father really needed two blankets instead of one. She herself was at her best. Most of the time, in other words, she kept her mouth shut.

Don Louis was pleased with them. They had made good time. But he was not pleased with himself. In calculating the number of dollars needed to pay for the tribe's out-and-out necessities, he had made a trifling error—which ran into four figures.

The Little Pickerupper comforted her father with the assertion that there is no comfort in crying over spilled milk. " There is," she said, " more gold where this came from, and Father Alfredo and myself will be glad to fetch it for you any time you say the word."

" The rains," said Don Louis, " are almost upon us. Our greatest tribal need both for practical and religious reasons is to get the seed corn into the ground immediately after the first rain, on the day chosen for us by the Moon. As originally planned, Father Alfredo will proceed at once to Ladrone to obtain seed corn for all of us and absolution for himself. Immediately upon his return, you will once more guide him to the treasure cave."

For the first time since he had seen the treasure, a good and practical means of obtaining a large quantity of the gold for himself and a group of his most intimate, disreputable, and trustworthy friends took sudden and complete form in Alfredo's head. It was,

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spiritually speaking, like the dawn of a new day. He smiled and said, " A pleasure."

And it was.

Alfredo had no sooner entered the town of Ladrone than he was seized and hustled to the bedside of a dark, wiry little man who had been shot down in a saloon brawl and was thought to be dying.

When he was alone with this man, Alfredo said, " Ernesto, old friend and companion, it will please you in your dying moments to learn that I know where there is an immense treasure of gold, to be had for the taking."

Ernesto sat bolt upright in the middle of his deathbed and said, " Who the hell says I am dying ? And who the hell are you ? "

" I am Alfredo."

" I am one of those who helped to hang your dead body to a piñon tree."

" It was the body of a dead priest which you helped to hang."

" Horrors," exclaimed Ernesto, and crossed himself.

" Do you by any chance," asked Alfredo, " know of a place which the Indians call the Hole in the Wall ? "

" Who doesn't ? "

" Well, I didn't for one, but I do now."

" So what ? "

" Six weeks from today when you have recovered from the flea bite in your shoulder, which was thought to be a mortal wound, you will meet me at the Hole in the Wall. You will bring three or four of our closest and most trusted friends, Juan and Juanito perhaps, the little Montoyo, and the Americano, Bill. You will bring at least a dozen pack horses, and a horse for me myself to ride. Six weeks from today at the exact crack of dawn you will meet me at the Hole in the Wall, and I will guide you to the treasure."

" Suppose something happens to you, and you don't show up ? Can't you tell me the way from the Hole in the Wall to the treasure so that in a sudden pinch of necessity I could find it for myself ? "

" No," said Alfredo. " I can't."

" Don't you trust me ? "

" Naturally. But the fact is I don't know the way myself."

" If you don't know it now, how will you know it then ? "

" Very easily. Not only will I discern it then, but you, Juan, Juanito, Montoyo, and the worthy Bill will all discern it at the same moment. Pardon me a moment while I ask the old hag who runs the hovel in which we find ourselves for a bottle of wine. I will then tell you a story which you could not believe if it were told you by anybody but me."

The wine was fetched and the story told. The only fact that

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Alfredo, out of a kind of self-delicacy, doctored, was the means by which he had been blindfolded. If he had confessed to the feed bag, he might have made himself a little ridiculous in the eyes of Ernesto, and come down a peg or two in the influence he had over him.

"And still I don't quite see."

"You wouldn't. Until a thing has been carefully explained to you, you never do. So listen carefully. I am here in Ladrone to buy seed corn for the tribe. My tribe. Bushels of it. Out of this corn, I shall reserve a few handfuls for myself. When I have returned to the tribe I shall set out at once, guided by the Little One, the Little Pickerupper—the World's Number One Nuisance—for the treasure cave.

"Now, you know as well as I do that when a man is properly blindfolded, as I shall be, he cannot see straight ahead, nor up, nor sideways. But if he has in the middle of his face what you might call an adventurous nose, the bandage cannot press so closely against his eyes that he may not see a little in a downward direction.

"On the journey to the cave, therefore, whenever we pass over what looks to be a likely pocket of soil, I shall drop a few kernels of corn. The time for planting corn is now. The rainy season is almost upon us. Already there have been showers. In ten days, the corn I have planted will sprout. In six weeks, it will be tall enough to show from a distance and even to wave its long leaves in the wind. The way, then, from the Hole in the Wall to the treasure cave will be so clearly marked that even a fool could find it. You, yourself, for instance, if six weeks from today I cannot meet you at the Hole in the Wall, will be able to point it out to your companions."

"Everything is now clear," said Ernesto, "but you have said that there is a writing over the cave."

"And the writing, having been carved into the rock by holy Fathers, has all the weight of one of the Ten Commandments—'*TAKE WHAT YOU NEED AND NO MORE.*'"

"If, by an oversight, we were to take more than we actually needed, what would happen to us?"

Alfredo kept his face straight. "After your death," he said, "you would, of course, burn everlastingly in the fires of hell."

"How are we to know how much we actually need?"

"Each bar of gold weighs about fifty pounds and is worth about twenty one thousand dollars. You will need exactly as many of these bars as can be loaded on to twelve pack horses—and no more."

Ernesto giggled, but it hurt his shoulder, and he pulled a long face. "Is it true," he asked, "that the rich have many responsibilities not shared or even understood by the poor?"

"I do not know for sure," said Alfredo, "but six weeks from

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today, we shall begin to find out. You and I, Juan and Juanito, the worthy Bill and the versatile Montoyo."

The sacks of seed corn were lugged into the church and placed before the altar. Here Alfredo, wearing all the canonicals available, and in the presence of the entire tribe, blessed them.

But the handfuls he had retained for his own use did not share in the blessing, and this may have been a mistake.

Be that as it may, Alfredo and the Little One set out at once for the treasure cave, and whenever they passed over a suitable looking terrain, Alfredo dropped a few kernels of the unblessed corn.

All the while he was in the cave sawing the required number of slices from a bar of gold, it rained. But nicely. It wasn't a flood or a torrent or a cloudburst; or any of the usual kinds of rain they have in the Southwest, but an even, steady, puttering, pattering, corn-planting rain. He thought with glee of the corn he himself had planted from the burro's back. Without doubt, it was already beginning to swell. If Alfredo had been a cat, he would have purred.

When the last slice had been sawed, Alfredo was in a sweat, and the Little One, putting down a long stick, one end of which she had been sharpening, and dragging a handkerchief the size of a bandanna from a dungaree pocket, wiped his face and forehead.

"What is that stick for, Pequeña?"

"That is to prod the burro from behind. We know now that he will follow like a lamb, but we do not know if he will lead. I wish to know if he can find the way from this place to the Hole in the Wall all by his own self."

Alfredo soon wished that she had not had this happy thought. Every now and then she prodded the burro from behind, and he rushed forwards as if he had been shot out of a gun. The rush was in reality nothing but a fast trot. But the component parts of this trot were so short and sudden that a man could neither sit down to them nor rise to them.

Alfredo, who had broken many a wild horse and finished in the bronco-busting money at many a rodeo, was close to biting the dust a dozen times. Only his long legs saved him, first on one side and then on the other. All the way to the Hole in the Wall, he alternated between terror and anger.

Pequeña's shrieks and howls of laughter did not help him; only the knowledge that the labyrinthine trail had been well and truly marked with corn, and that a lot of this would sprout and grow upwards into wavy green signposts, comforted him. Six weeks from three days before yesterday, at the crack of dawn, I shall meet my friends here; with Ernesto, with Juan and with Juanito, with the worthy Bill and the versatile Montoyo, and all will be well.

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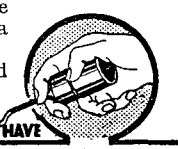

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" Little One," he said, " while we rest here a little, sing me the Riding Song that your people have borrowed from the Navaho."

The Little One, who delighted in the limelight, put back her head and at once began to howl like a baby wolf:

" *All is beautiful before me,*
*All is beautiful behind me,*
*All is beautiful around me.*
*In beauty I ride.*"

" You must teach me that one," said Alfredo, " it is very beautiful."

And he imagined himself singing it for the benefit of his companions, just six weeks from three days before yesterday, as he led them and the twelve pack horses along the waving corn trail to the vast treasure of Peruvian gold.

' *TAKE WHAT YOU NEED AND NO MORE*,' he thought to himself and began suddenly to howl with laughter.

" Father," said Pequeña, when he had calmed himself, " do you have holes in all your pockets ? "

" Certainly not," said Alfredo. " At least I don't think so. Why do you ask ? "

" Because you are all the time dropping things, and I have to pick them up and give them back to you. All the way from this place to the treasure cave you shed corn like a big ear that was being shucked. My back is all kinked from bending over and picking it all up on the way back. Well here it is."

She handed him the bandanna handkerchief, knotted together by the four corners and bulging with the corn he had so hopefully and confidently planted.

" You will have to give me back the handkerchief," she said, " because when I catch cold my nose runs."

But Alfredo was silent. He was beginning to wonder where he had better be in exactly six weeks from three days before yesterday.

* * *

*SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page* 160

*Across.* 1, What's yours. 9, Till. 10, Guineafowl. 11, Vestry. 12, Nitre. 15, Pound. 18, Ruler. 19, Enslave. 20, Libra. 21, Bring. 22, Teatime. 23, Reach. 24, Light. 26, Steel. 29, Meagre. 31, Rightfully. 32, Gill. 33, Elementary.

*Down.* 2, Hour. 3, Tendon. 4, Yearn. 5, U Boat. 6, Salve. 7, Distilling. 8, Playwright. 13, Instant. 14, Realize. 15, Pilgrimage. 16, Unbearable. 17, Death. 18, Rebel. 25, Induct. 26, Serge. 27, Eagle. 28, Lithe. 30, Slur.

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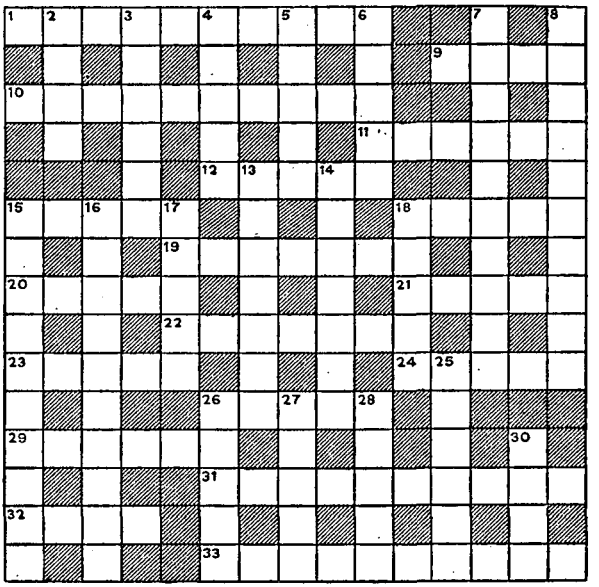
# *ARGOSY CROSS WORD*

**Solution on page 159**



## CLUES

### Across

**1** Enquiry — or a refreshing invitation (5, 5).
**9** There may be money in this part of **7** down (4).
**10** Game not bought in the bon marché ? (6, 4).
**11** A holy place where some disrobe (6).
**12** Not Struwel Peter but his salty kinsman in a tin of gunpowder ! (5).
**15** Half a florin with this might buy 10 across (5).
**18** " I will make thee — over many things " (New Testament) (5).
**19** Part of a forgotten Slav empire (7).
**20** Heavenly sign that has been devalued (5).
**21** Or buy — a very small circle at the jewellers ? (5).
**22** Hour of a famous Boston party ? (7).
**23** "Ah, but a man's — should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for ?" (Robert Browning) (5).
**24** A famous failure of Rudyard Kipling (5).
**26** Part of the clubs used on the middle of this are made of this (5).
**29** Many show great enthusiasm with insufficient result (6).
**31** At least this clue is here legitimately (10).
**32** The amount of water Jack went to fetch ? (4).
**33** There are real men yet, so it's quite simple (10).

### Down

**2** " Nay 'twill be this — ere I have done weeping " (The Two Gentlemen of Verona) (4).
**3** The limit of this tissue is contained in a heavyweight (6).
**4** A wish which might not be fulfilled within most of itself (5).
**5** A personal weapon, made for divers reasons (1, 4).
**6** Heal the wounds of the slave (5).
**7** The result of extracting the essence of a sea fish ? (10).
**8** It doesn't only need this man to make the performance go correctly (10).
**13** When tin ants appear at the picnic their removal should be this (7).
**14** Sounds as if proper frozen water might make you comprehend ! (7).
**15** Are years added to the wanderer who reaches the sacred place ? (10).
**16** The last straw, perhaps ? (10).
**17** Happily its sting appears to have been mislaid (5).
**18** More popular with the Lower Fourth than behind the Iron Curtain (5).
**25** Literally lead into (6).
**26** Fabric for the Russian at sea ? (5).
**27** Next best to doing a hole in one probably (5).
**28** Illuminated man who would seem a sporting fellow (5).
**30** One over the eight may do this to your speech, or even a mouthful of pebbles (4).

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